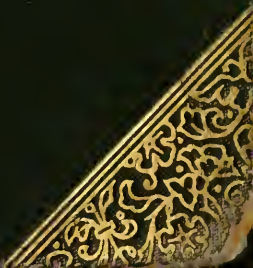


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RENAN'S LIFE OF JESUS.

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

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THE following translation of Renan's *Vie de Jésus* is made from the thirteenth edition of the complete work, which embodies the author's more mature views of his subject. So far as I am aware, the English renderings already existent are either made from earlier editions, or from an abridged version which Renan prepared for popular reading. Owing to the limits of the Series to which this volume belongs, inclusion of the author's elaborate preface, introduction, appendix, and notes has been found impossible. These features appeal however to the specialist rather than to the general reader, and, for the latter, their absence scarcely impairs the interest of the work itself. In an edition for English readers, I have thought it desirable to collate all the author's biblical quotations with the Revised Version of the English Bible, and to give the references.

I am under great obligation to Mr. Henry Hooton for his useful criticisms, but my chief thanks are to Miss Katherine Buckman, whose assistance was as constant as it was valuable.



## INTRODUCTION.

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THE year 1860 marked an important point in the life of Ernest Renan. Having acquired, by years of hard work and unremitting study, a European reputation as man of letters and as a writer of authority on the Semitic languages and Oriental archæology, he was commissioned by the Imperial government to proceed to Syria and undertake an expedition in quest of ancient Phœnician monuments, sites, and inscriptions. For this welcome opportunity of coming face to face with the land whose peoples, languages, and traditions had been of life-long and absorbing interest to him, Renan was probably indebted to his friend Prince Napoleon ("Plon Plon"), and, in a still greater degree, to a remarkable woman, Madame Cornu, to whose influence with Napoleon III. were due important improvements in higher education and the promotion of scientific and archæological research by the state. Renan's Phœnician expedition was perhaps the most notable of the scientific missions undertaken at the national cost.

Renan reached Beyrout in October. He was accompanied by his wife and his sister Henriette; and the latter remained with him after Madame Renan's enforced return to France. She was his constant companion and assistant; but he went home alone. At Byblos brother and sister were simultaneously stricken with fever, and Renan awoke

from a long interval of unconsciousness to find that Henriette was dead. This bereavement was the great sorrow of a happy life. Like Madame Cornu, Henriette had been a silent benefactor, a good genius of whom the world knew little but of whom her brother knew much. From his short biographical sketch—originally printed for private circulation—and from the volume of correspondence recently published, one may learn how deeply he was indebted to her tender and unselfish solicitude, to her unfailing love, and to her unswerving intellectual honesty. As is related in the exquisitely phrased dedication to the present volume, the *Life of Jesus* had been begun, carried on, and, in its first form, completed during Renan's stay in Palestine, in the midst of the scenes in which the tragic story it relates had taken place. How clearly the essential features of the Syrian landscape impressed themselves on the historian, and with what subtle charm he rendered those impressions, one may judge from the praise that has been bestowed on his descriptions by later travellers.

But, while the *Life of Jesus* was in a high degree inspired by Renan's sojourn in the East, there can be no doubt that it would have been written had the author never left France. In a sense his whole previous life had formed a preparation for his task of chronicling the beginnings of Christianity, and all his studies had been subsidiary to the historical treatment of what, in his view, was the most significant cycle of events in history. In an essay, first published about ten years before his visit to the East, he had submitted some previous historians of Jesus to a critical examination, the most interesting feature of which is the section devoted to Strauss, whose first *Life of Jesus* had appeared in 1835. Despite his high appreciation of the

German writer, Renan's view of Jesus as an actual person, the events of whose career were rather nuclei of legendary tradition than pure myths, and his characteristically French distrust of metaphysical theory, somewhat qualify his praise of the *Leben Jesu*.

It was only after careful revision that Renan's own book was given to the world. Considering the effusive emotion that not infrequently characterises the work, even in its final form, one may feel some gratitude for the fact that Renan, according to his own account, spent a year in toning down the exuberance of his first draft.<sup>1</sup> On its publication in 1863 it was soon apparent that the *Life of Jesus* was to be one of the most hotly discussed books of the century. By a very large public it was welcomed with indiscriminating applause. As Sainte-Beuve acutely remarked, we find in modern society a considerable number of persons, not believers, and yet at the same time neither decidedly nor systematically sceptical. Having, like Renan himself, a very full appreciation of the luxury of religious emotion, they are too deeply impressed with vague notions of the omnipotence of science, and, more or less unconsciously, have absorbed the modern spirit too much to be enticed back to the ancient ways. To this large body of readers, somewhat nebulous in their opinions, and disinclined to justify them in self-examination, Renan appealed with great success. It was pleasing for them to find that they had been Christians *sans le savoir*, and Christians without the difficulties and intellectual self-surrender of less easily satisfied souls. That the excessive praise of such readers as these should be balanced by a no less excessive depreciation on the part of the orthodox, and that the latter should turn and attempt

<sup>1</sup> *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*, p. 355.

to rend the new apostle to the Laodiceans, was but natural. Archbishops, Jesuits, priests, theological professors, and dissenting ministers joined eagerly in a heresy hunt of unprecedented dimensions, the heavens were darkened with a multitude of pamphlets, and reviews, and controversial treatises; pulpits rang with indignant denunciations; Renan's private character was picturesquely defamed; and an anonymous but pious lady, with the best intentions in the world, commenced the monthly despatch to him of a letter containing the brief warning, "There is a hell!"

That biography is one of the least facile of arts, that its really great and successful examples can be counted on the fingers, is almost platitude. The difficulties of adequately analysing one of our fellows, of reaching the secrets of his inmost nature, of satisfactorily accounting for his often inconsistent actions and ideas, are such as to make the path of the biographer one of great difficulty. While the novelist has only to obey his own æsthetic conscience and avoid any decided breach of probability, the writer of biography must necessarily come into conflict with those whose conceptions of his subject are already formed, and as diverse from his own as they well can be. And when that subject happens to be a man of a different age, of a different race, the materials for whose life are at once scanty and in great part untrustworthy, it is easy to see that the pitfalls and risk of error incidental to all biography are increased tenfold. All these difficulties Renan had in his work, and, over and above, he had the special difficulty of dealing with a subject in which everybody takes an interest, of which everybody has a theory, of which many people have a theory that in their minds is a certainty to be defended with passionate zeal, and with every available weapon.

It was perhaps only to be expected that orthodox critics of the last category should disregard their Master's aphorism about casting the first stone, and charge Renan with the terrible offence of having an *à priori* theory of his subject. Why it was unfair for him to have his own theory of Jesus, and how indeed he could have avoided forming one, are matters too deep for me to fathom. Dean Farrar, and for that matter, the author of the fourth Gospel, have never, so far as I know, been accused of unfairness on the ground that they had a firm belief in the divinity of Jesus before commencing their respective biographies. Interest in a subject is surely essential to its adequate treatment, and interest implies the formation of opinions.

But the champions of religious dogmas, whatever the particular creed held by them, have never looked with favour on the formation of opinions other than their own. *Sois mon frère ou je vous tue*, is a phrase that might come very appropriately from the lips of religious fanatics, whether Mohammedan zealots putting captive towns to the sword, or the officers of the Inquisition chastening heretics and freethinkers with a foretaste of hell fire. Of course nobody thought of putting Renan on the rack or tying him to the stake; but the doctrine that error—for which read deviation from orthodox theory—is a sin, coloured every reply to his book that came from the orthodox forces. However the leaders of these forces might differ among themselves, they were agreed that Christianity stands or falls by miracles and the supernatural, that any one who does not admit the divinity of Jesus is not qualified to write about him, and that, if he does write, his work is valueless, or rather, pernicious. In fairness it should be added that zealots at the opposite pole of thought, agreeing with their opponents

that the existence of Christianity depends on the miraculous, attacked Renan with great warmth, on the ground that he unduly glorified the subject of his biography.<sup>1</sup> The sceptical friend whom Sainte-Beuve introduces into his critique of the *Life of Jesus* is very severe on what he regards as unnecessary concessions on the part of the author. Renan, he says, resembles Charles II. telling General Monk to be anything he likes except king; all titles, all honours, all glories are to be ascribed to Jesus so long as he is not called God.<sup>2</sup>

For freethinkers who have grown conservative in their disbelief all assertion of the positive value, the enduring truth immanent in Christianity must be more or less galling; and passage from a Christianity relying on miracles and metaphysical theories about vicarious sacrifice, incarnation, and the Council of the Trinity to a Christianity relying on everyday human experience, must also be painful to those who think these miracles and theories essential to their faith. To Renan, however, such an assertion and such a passage seemed necessary, and credit for having done his best in the matter may at least be accorded him, however much his work may be attacked as regards execution and detail. Of the principal orthodox controversial works directed against the *Vie de Jésus*, I do not think it unfair to say that in them all the greater part of the adverse criticism, except such as might proceed equally well from an agnostic, is based on the assumption that, Jesus being

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, *Opinion des déistes rationalistes sur la Vie de Jésus selon M. Renan*, par P. Larroque, Paris, 1863, a work which amply justifies the saying of the Goncourts, that when incredulity becomes a faith it is more unreasonable than religion.

<sup>2</sup> Sainte-Beuve, *Nouveaux Lundis*, tom. vi.



God, Renan had no right to give him the same biographical treatment as he would have given to Socrates or Mohammed. In other words, he was wrong in weighing probabilities, in examining evidence, using that which seemed valuable and rejecting that which seemed valueless, or, in short, in using any of the comparative methods employed in writing secular history. To take some obvious instances, he had no right to assume that unusual events, alleged to have taken place in uncritical times when people were too little acquainted with nature to distinguish between it and super-nature, and not observed to recur in times when they can be scientifically tested, are unworthy of full credence; he had no right to point out the falsification by reality of the belief cherished by Jesus, or his reporters, of the imminent coming of the Messiah to judge and reign over the earth;<sup>1</sup> he had no right to remark on the obvious differences between the synoptic Jesus and the Jesus of the fourth Gospel, or to base his conception of the Master on the no less obvious fact that, historically, the former Jesus is much the more possible.

But the *Life of Jesus* was not primarily intended as a work of religious edification, though indeed I once heard an "anti-infidel" lecturer in Hyde Park call it one of his favourite books; it was an attempt at a historical view of the life and work "of a wonderful spirit, far above the heads of his reporters, still farther above the head of our popular theology, which has added its own misunderstanding of the reporters to the reporters' misunderstanding of

<sup>1</sup> The extremely significant sayings reported in Matt. x. 23, Luke xxi. 32, and Luke ix. 27, should be noted. See also 1 Cor. vii. 29; Philipp. iv. 5; 1 Peter iv. 7; 1 John ii. 18; James v. 8, 9; 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, Renan considered it essential to his purpose not to conceive of his authorities as supernaturally inspired works—which, as his orthodox critics usually forget, remains to be proved—but as books full of contradictions, myths, and naïve ignorance, in which the truth is only to be found by a process of sifting. “Criticism,” as he remarked, “knows of no infallible texts; its first principle is to admit the possibility of error in the text which it studies.”<sup>2</sup> It need scarcely be added that, while every serious student has long admitted this as an axiom for general historical investigation, it is only recently, and with considerable reluctance, that the principle has been partially adopted by orthodox writers dealing with religious history. To approach the critical consideration of an historical work there is then but one legitimate method—to inquire first, What are its authorities? and secondly, What use has been made of these authorities? Let us briefly consider these two questions in relation to the present work.

Renan’s chief authorities may be classed under five heads: (1) The works of Philo, (2) those of Josephus, (3) the so-called Apocryphal books of the Old Testament, (4) the Talmud, and (5) the Gospels and other New Testament writings. Of course, besides these principal sources of information, there were innumerable others. Renan’s encyclopædic reading, and his faculty for collecting and systematising his knowledge, make his pages bristle with references and citations. It was remarked of Hume that his History of England would have been more accurate

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> *Vie de Jésus*: Préface de la 13<sup>me</sup> édition, p. 5.

but for his occasional necessity of imagining his facts, from the difficulty of navigating his portly person to the other end of the sofa where the means of verification lay. However much one may ascribe to Renan's imagination, his industry in collecting and utilising evidence from every quarter cannot be gainsaid. It will be well to give a brief outline of his views on the writings stated above.

The study of Philo permits one to judge of the ideas that were active in the world immediately before the birth of Jesus and during his lifetime. Although Philo lived in a Judaistic centre altogether removed from that of Jesus, and though there is no probability of his ever having even heard of him, there are curious parallelisms between the teachings of the Alexandrian doctor and those of the peasant of Nazareth. Similar parallelisms are also to be noted, it is true, with the recorded *Logia* of Hillel and other Jewish teachers anterior to Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The works of Josephus, the Old Testament apocryphal writings (such as the book of

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 23 and 285. I hardly think, however, that Renan lays sufficient stress on the points of contact between the Hindu religions and Christian doctrine. Without taking Schopenhauer's extreme view, that an agreement is brought about in the most essential matters between Old Testament doctrines and the Indian religions, and that everything which is true in Christianity is to be found in Brahmanism and Buddhism—a view which obviously implies the satisfaction of "jesting Pilate's" demand for a definition of truth—there can be no doubt that resemblances exist, resemblances which extend to form as well as to idea. Thus the saying of Jesus, "The kingdom of heaven is within you," and his comparison with a grain of mustard seed may be placed beside, "This Self of mine in the heart within is smaller than a grain of rice, or a grain of mustard seed, or a grain of millet, or a grain of millet's kernel; this Self of mine, in the heart within, is greater than the earth, greater than the air, greater than heaven, greater than these worlds" (*Chhandogya Upanishad*, iii. 14, 3).

Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Jewish portion of the Sibylline Poems, and the book of Daniel<sup>1</sup>) and the Talmud, are of like service in giving a picture of contemporary thought and history and of the motive forces influencing them. Renan believes the notice of Jesus in the history of Josephus to be, in the main, authentic, although probably retouched by the Christians, who regarded his work as an essential document in their history and—probably in the second century—circulated an edition of it, corrected in accordance with their own ideas. The possible connection of the author of Luke and the Acts with Josephus I shall remark on later. In the Talmud (the compilation of which, Renan thinks, extended from about 200 to 500 A.D.) innumerable and important details of the Gospels find a commentary. Jewish theology and Christian theology having followed two parallel paths, the history of one cannot be understood without reference to the other.

The New Testament writings were naturally the main foundation for the *Life of Jesus*, and the author's use of them one of the principal points of attack by orthodox critics, the latter's grievance being his separation of what he regarded as historical from what he considered

<sup>1</sup> Some of Renan's reasons for classing the book of Daniel with the apocryphal writings may be briefly summarised. The character of the two languages in which it is written, the use of Greek words, the definite and dated account of events extending almost to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the incorrect details of Babylon, the apocalyptic character of the visions, and the place of the book in the Hebrew canon outside the series of the Prophets, lead him to think that the work was a fruit of the great religious exaltation caused among the Jews by the persecution of Antiochus.

legendary and of the nature of *Aberglaube*. It was of course in the Synoptics, especially in Mark and Matthew, that he found most trustworthy material for the making of his history. But neither in Matthew nor in Mark in their present form do we have the original Gospels attributed to these writers. The first records of Jesus must of course have been oral. It was only when eye-witnesses were beginning to disappear, and when the idea of a closely approaching heavenly kingdom seemed to recede farther and farther into the future, that adherents sought to give floating reminiscence of their Master a durable form, and to write down the sayings and anecdotes that were in danger of being forgotten. And with these authentic reports of the sayings and doings of Jesus, it requires no great knowledge of human nature to believe, many others of an apocryphal kind must have been mingled. The members of the early Church, on special occasions or when confronted by special difficulties, must often have pondered what Jesus would have had to say about the matter. Considering that there was no settled New Testament canon, and that the material now forming this canon was then in a fluid state, it is easy to see how such hypothetical utterances, by passing from mouth to mouth, might ultimately be accepted as authentic. The first written Gospel was that known as the Gospel of the Hebrews, which was extant among the Judaistic Christians of Syria, until their destruction in the fifth century; and it somewhat resembled the Gospel of Matthew, though the latter was a perfectly distinct work. Mark indeed, a short biography dealing mainly with the acts of Jesus, was the first synoptic Gospel to be written, and the author of Matthew used both it and the Hebrew Gospel in the composition of his work, which

is distinctively a report of the *Logia* or sayings of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Neither of these Gospels could remain absolutely fixed. Even in the second century oral tradition was preferred, and, no doubt, those who possessed copies of one of the books were in the habit of adding details which might reach them from other sources, and of combining and amplifying narratives.

The Gospel of Luke is of a nature different from the more or less fragmentary Gospels of Mark and Matthew. "It is the work of a man who selects, prunes, combines." In other words, it is a professedly complete history founded on previous documents. Renan does not think it probable that Luke, whom he holds to be the author of the Acts, knew the Gospel of Matthew, but he assimilated the whole of Mark, while about a third part of his book is to be found in neither the first nor the second Synoptic but comes from other sources. Luke's Gospel, in contrast to the more exclusive spirit of Peter, James, and the Judaistic Christians, is the Gospel of universal brotherhood and forgiveness of sins, and would appear to be the work of a disciple of Paul, a partisan for the admission of Gentiles, publicans, sinners, and heretics into the Christian community, an exponent of the wider view of the Master's teaching as applicable to all men in all lands.<sup>2</sup> Renan, who does not attach the same historical value to Luke as to Mark and Matthew, dates it from Rome about the end of the first century, and he attri-

<sup>1</sup> Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (in the first half of the second century), draws this distinction; he speaks of an anecdotic narrative written by Mark from reminiscences derived from the apostle Peter, and of a collection of sayings made by Matthew.

<sup>2</sup> Note, for instance, that in Luke seventy disciples are sent out by Jesus, in the other Gospels only twelve.

lutes the many analogies between it and the history of Josephus to the authors' contemporary residence in that city. An even more direct connection between the two writers is maintained by Holtzmann and other German critics, proceeding on the generally recognised assumption that Luke was not a Jew but a Gentile Christian, from which they postulate that he got his knowledge of Jewish history from Josephus, whose works were largely circulated in Rome at the time.

However difficult the problem of the dates and connection of the Synoptics might be, and whatever careful discrimination was required in order to settle even tentatively the historical value that could be reasonably attached to them, the Gospel known as that of John presented difficulties of a still more serious nature, difficulties which Renan recognised by completely changing his views regarding the fourth Gospel in the thirteenth edition of the *Life of Jesus*, and devoting many pages to a discussion and defence of his new position. The theories, which have been, and are, held of the authenticity of the Gospel in question may be conveniently divided into four classes. In the first place we have the ordinary orthodox view, which requires no comment, that the fourth Gospel was written by John, son of Zebedee, that the facts recounted in it actually occurred, and that the discourses it attributes to Jesus were really uttered by him. Secondly, there is the theory, adopted by Renan in the earlier editions of his book, that the fourth Gospel is substantially the work of the apostle John, although it may have been edited and retouched by his disciples, that the events related are direct traditions, but that the discourses are frequently free compositions, only expressing the way in which the author conceived of

the mind of Jesus. This comparatively moderate theory, held by Reuss, Ewald, and others, is in strong contrast to the more thoroughgoing scepticism of Baur, Strauss, Réville, and the Tübingen school generally, who maintained the absolute untrustworthiness of the fourth Gospel, and the impossibility of regarding its relation of either events or discourses as historical. In short, we have before us a work of imagination, partly allegorical, in which the author's intention is not to give a plain biographical narrative, but to disseminate his own views of Jesus.

Renan's instinctive dislike to taking extreme or negative views, or at least to enunciating them distinctly, led him finally to a position midway between the theory originally held by him and the last-mentioned hypothesis. He regarded the fourth Gospel as not being the work of John, but as having been attributed to him by its author, one of his disciples writing about the year 100. The discourses are, he thought, entirely fictitious, or at least only represent the teaching of Jesus as Plato's Dialogues represent that of Socrates, but the narrative portions include valuable traditions, in part derived directly from John. Considering that Renan devotes more than a hundred closely printed pages to justifying and amplifying the theory which I have just epitomised, it is obviously impossible for me to deal adequately with the matter in the limits of a short introduction. I can only give therefore the briefest outline of his reasons for abandoning his first and more conservative conception, and for not adopting that of Tübingen.

To determine the approximate date of a literary work, it is admittedly necessary to take external evidence by finding when it was first mentioned or quoted. It is in the present instance significant that neither Polycarp, who was one of



John's most devoted disciples, nor Papias, who must have had intercourse with some of John's followers and was ever eager for any scraps of tradition he could collect, says a word of a written Gospel by John, while Justin, even if he knew the work, does not connect it with the author of the Apocalypse. Moreover, in the pseudo-Clementine Homilies, in Marcion, and in the apocryphal Gospels, there is no indication of the fourth Gospel being given the same canonical authority as those of the Synoptics. On the other hand, it must have been written not later than 100, before full canonicity had been acquired by the synoptic Gospels, since otherwise it would have scarcely diverged so far from them; and it must have won its own place in the canon towards the close of the second century, for it played an important part in a theological controversy concerning the Passover at Laodicea about 170, and Theophilus of Antioch (about 180) positively asserts it to be from the pen of John. This stamp of authenticity, moreover, argues the existence of the book (probably as an edifying though uncanonical work) for some time preceding; such honour would scarcely have been accorded to a recent narrative.

What is to be gleaned from internal evidence? The author, whoever he was, attempts to pose as John, as an eye-witness of the events recorded, and throughout is manifest his desire to show that apostle in the best light, to exhibit him as taking a leading rôle, as being "the disciple whom Jesus loved." In accordance with the wish to make the narrative appear the relation of an actual observer, there is much apparent exactitude of detail on many small points,<sup>1</sup> and in these Renan sees traditions proceeding directly from John. But of course the chief

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, John ii. 6; iv. 52; v. 5; vi. 9, 19; xxi. 11.

characteristic of the book is its discourses—discourses in which the exact position of the supernatural Jesus is stated with a metaphysical subtlety which in no way harmonises with the *Logia* of the Synoptics, or indeed with what one might naturally expect from a poor peasant belonging to a race which had, up to that time, exhibited no taste for abstract speculation, but which is entirely consistent with the intellectual state of Asia Minor at the time at which Renan supposes the Gospel to have been written. It is also to be noted that parables and exorcisms of demons, both frequent in the Synoptics, are entirely wanting. What argues moreover against the idea that this metaphysical treatise on the *Logos* could have been written by a Jewish fisherman, “an apostle of the circumcision,” is that the author speaks of the Jews, their ceremonies and festivals, from an outsider’s point of view, and almost disdainfully.<sup>1</sup> From these arguments which I have briefly summarised, Renan concludes that the fourth Gospel is not one of the earlier Christian books, and that it has not the same value to the historian as those attributed to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Between the two conceptions implied in this contrast choice must be made: “If Jesus spoke as Matthew represents him, he could not have spoken as John represents him.”<sup>2</sup>

Into an examination of Renan’s exegetical theories I do not propose to enter. Such an examination would occupy a great many pages, and, after all, would only appeal to specialists. But one does not require to be a specialist in order to form an opinion of Renan’s treatment of his sub-

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, John ii. 6, 13; vi. 4; x. 31, 33; xviii. 36; xix. 31, 38, 42.

<sup>2</sup> Renan’s Introduction, p. 69.

ject, and of the general lines of the work as history and as literature. Its merits as a piece of literature are indeed very great. That supremely beautiful instrument for prose, the French language, has seldom been handled with higher distinction or with more consummate mastery than in certain passages of the *Life of Jesus*, passages of haunting beauty, which nevertheless are not of the nature of "purple patches," but have the quality of being integral and inevitable parts of the work in its totality. He had indeed subject-matter which was, in many respects, of great beauty morally and æsthetically, and it naturally inspired one of such extreme sensitivity to moral and æsthetic beauty. But he had the defects of his qualities in full measure. A friendly critic phrased the matter very neatly. "It must be confessed," said Réville, "that on the whole his Jesus appeals less to conscience than to the æsthetic sense." That in him legitimate and honest sentiment was but too ready to turn to sentimentalism, that occasionally he seems to feel for the mere pleasure of feeling, and betrays himself with such false and jangled notes as the sentimentalist is doomed to strike, is only too evident. Far too often the mingled nobility and sweetness of his utterance is apt to lose the former element and become almost nauseously saccharine in intensity. It is like passing from the Good Friday music in *Parsifal* to the treacly mysticism of the *Stabat Mater*. *Facilis descensus*—once let Renan begin to lose himself in clouds of universal benevolence and nebulous religiosity, and he perseveres in the downward course until the end of a chapter brings him back to his subject. This tendency of his art to over-reach itself and defeat its own object is manifest, not only in the style, but in the whole plan and character of the book. It begins with pastoral comedy and

ends with tragedy. Obviously the antithesis is intended, but not less obviously the insistence with which it is urged makes it forced, unreal, almost theatrical. This is particularly characteristic of the earlier chapters of the book. Jesus is a sort of theological troubadour, the disciples a band of "happy children," amiable enthusiasts whose innocent doubts are gently but triumphantly crushed with a smile or a look, their life a delectable combination of idyllic vagrancy and *fêtes champêtres*. Orthodox conceptions of the founder and the beginnings of Christianity have assuredly been often grotesque and unreal in all conscience, but it has been reserved for a professedly serious student of history to put on record this Gospel in Dresden china, this picnic Christianity. Nor is the organic unity present which should make it possible for this *charmant docteur* with his *douceur extraordinaire* to be identified with the *sombre géant* of later days. I concede that the antithesis was actually existent, that Jesus on Calvary was very different from Jesus on the shore of Genesareth, and I have the fullest appreciation for Renan's treatment of the closing scenes of his tragedy, but I entirely fail to see that the former and latter Jesus as he presents them are consistent one with the other.

From the same source proceeds his frequent laxity in the use of certain words and phrases. To turn a sentence, to elaborate a peroration, he permits himself a latitude of expression which, in cold blood, he would probably have softened down, if not repudiated. To take the most cogent instance, he certainly lays himself open to the cross fire of both orthodox and heterodox critics by his indiscriminate and irresponsible employment of the words "God" and "Father," which might provoke a direct query as to whether

he believed in a God or not, and, if not, why he constantly seemed to assume God's existence. One is sometimes persuaded of the truth of the saying that language was given to man to conceal thought. I am not forgetful that every man is entitled to his own definition of God; Spinoza was fond of repeating that "the love of God" was man's *summum bonum*, and, by the phrase "love of God," expressing a passionate zeal in the quest of scientific truth. Yet, to say the least of it, such diverse definitions are somewhat bewildering to the plain man. And, as the plain man in his thousands was among Renan's readers, such equivocal usages of speech were scarcely commendable.

The mention of Spinoza's name at this point may recall another aspect of that thinker's work, of interest in the present case—his naturalistic explanations of some Old Testament miracles,—the Red Sea retreating before a strong wind, the Shunamite's son revived by the natural heat of Elisha's body, and so forth. Ingenious attempts of this kind were not altogether to Renan's taste, but he has not much better to offer: his treatment of miracles throughout is neither adequate nor satisfactory. In a manner scarcely worthy of a true critic, he makes no attempt to conceal his distaste for the whole matter, and, while he is too honest to minimise the importance of alleged supernatural occurrences giving an initial impetus to the new religion, he insists on their mere trickery and fraud in terms that betray his anxiety to point out that Jesus had far rather have worked no miracles at all, that he only worked them because it was expected of him to do so, because, had he not chosen to be a thaumaturgist, he would have had no success. This idea of Jesus deliberately making his choice in the matter and reluctantly conceding to popular opinion, seems to me as

grotesque as Renan's sweeping condemnation of thaumaturgists,<sup>1</sup> in which order must necessarily be included Charcot, Heidenhain, and every modern physician who employs hypnotic suggestion as a therapeutic agent. If by such means disease *can* be successfully treated, why should they not be used? I think it was of Napoleon that an opposing general complained, that he won his victories only by a culpable disregard of the laws of strategy.

Nor are Renan's views embodied in a comprehensive and consistent whole; several miracles he does not mention at all, such as the incident of the Gadarene swine, that of the feeding of the multitude, and that of Jesus walking on the sea. On the production of wine from water at Cana he only bestows a passing reference without comment. In the majority of cases he adopts the well-known expedient of looking the difficulty boldly in the face, and passing on.<sup>2</sup> He does not seem to have a sufficiently full appreciation of the value of suggestion in the large number of pathological states due to neurotic causes. This of course may be explained by the fact that the subject has in great measure been investigated since the publication of his book. A valuable commentary on the Gospel miracles might be compiled, I imagine, from the clinical records of the Salpêtrière. Such a commentary would probably show a very substantial basis of truth for the great majority of the healing miracles recorded of Jesus.

These miracles indeed may well be considered separately

<sup>1</sup> See p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> An exception must be made in the case of the Lazarus miracle. Here Renan, abandoning his more plausible hypothesis of premature burial, and following the somewhat far-fetched theory of Strauss and Baur, complacently pronounces the whole affair a pious fiction.

from those which are evidently of a mythical nature. In classifying or discussing occurrences of this kind, the first thing is to settle what we mean by a miracle. The orthodox person who asserts belief in miracles as infractions of the laws of nature—that glib phrase for observed sequences of phenomena—and the sceptic who denies them in a like manner, are equally exponents of a fallacy. Those who see in nature limitless possibilities, who believe that nature is all-inclusive and all-sufficing, who recognise that our science throws but a tiny flicker of light into the darkness around us, cannot accept the phrase “infraction of nature” as being other than meaningless. “The day-fly has better grounds for calling a thunder-storm supernatural than has man, with his experience of an infinitesimal fraction of duration, to say that the most astonishing event that can be imagined is beyond the scope of natural causes.”<sup>1</sup> Renan, if I read him aright, has a tendency to imagine that the last word is said in the matter, that science can only speak negatively, that there is no hope of fresh light being cast. But those who see in experimental psychology a science, new indeed, but still a science, can scarcely endorse his verdict. To take a crucial instance: is the hypothesis that an apparition of the Master appeared to the disciples after his death so utterly absurd, that Renan can afford to dismiss the point in half a page of rhetorical questions and unctuous platitudes about the disciples’ devotion and the divine power of woman’s love?

But, reversing the procedure of the prophet who was called to give curses and disappointed his employer by bestowing blessings, I am confining myself to merely negative criticism, when the occasion manifestly requires some

<sup>1</sup> T. H. Huxley, *Life of Hume*, p. 132.

assertion of the positive value of the work which follows. This positive value, I imagine, mainly resides in its subjective aspect, in its character as an account of the immensely important movement of a long past age by one of the most interesting and sensitive intellects of our own century. This subjective quality is of course so apparent on every page, that it is generally the first point of attack for those who engage in the adverse criticism of the book. Renan indeed is a good instance of the egoistic historian, the narrator who is rather lyrical than dramatic; the Jesus with whom he presents us is a Renanised Jesus—a Jesus who is gentle, ironical, at times almost gay—a Jesus, in short, who in many features resembles M. Ernest Renan. But what would we have? A biography of Jesus suited to every one's taste is out of the question; apart from necessary diversities of view, the materials are too scanty and too thickly encrusted with legend, for adequately historical treatment to be possible. "*So redt' ich wenn ich Christus wär*"—"Had I been Christ I should have spoken so:"—the words might come from any one attempting such a treatment, a treatment which must less resemble history in its strict sense than the historical novel or play. Gaps, it is true, exist in all history, and the palm is to him who can best use his imagination in filling them up. But the history of the founder of Christianity consists mainly of gaps, and the personal equation being so important a feature in Renan's literary labours, we need feel neither surprised nor indignant that his ingenious attempts at filling up these gaps should partake so greatly of the character of a personal revelation.

Not only indeed have we a personal revelation in the *Life of Jesus*, we have a revelation of the time-spirit. I have already pointed out how aptly it fitted the intellectual



and emotional temperament of a certain large number of persons; but, in no small measure, it had a wider bearing and represented a general tendency. To use a modern cant phrase, it appeared at a psychological moment. The somewhat barren deism of the eighteenth century, having fulfilled its purpose, had become a creed—or lack of creed—outworn. The deistic writers were fast fading into the limbo of oblivion. They had not written in vain so far as influence went, but if their influence remained, their books were forgotten. It is only Voltaire's wit, and his flashes of humorous common sense, that attract even the limited amount of attention from readers that his "philosophical works" now receive. Diderot, of course, was so much more than a destructive critic and facile writer, that, if anything, his reputation has a tendency to grow. But Holbach and his circle—Mirabaud, Fréret, Dumarsis, and the rest, have gone the way to dusty death.

Renan was not indeed the first French writer of this century to recognise the change which German exegesis had made in the problem. Reuss, Réville, and Scherer possess a European reputation as biblical critics, and all three were active before the publication of the *Life of Jesus*; while the foundation of the *Revue Germanique* had also had a deep influence on the formation of intellectual opinion in France. But Renan was the first to draw the attention of a wider public than that of *savants* and men of letters; and there can be little doubt that his success was mainly due to those of his characteristics—his insistent idealism, his almost devotional unction, and, it must be confessed, his frequent sentimentalism—in which he most widely diverged from the sceptics of the previous century.

These sceptics, who were fond of the discussion, if not

the practice of ethics, seemed scarcely to realise that the world was not to be regenerated by rational codes of morals and ideals of justice alone. As Renan points out with great force, two elements contributed to the success of Christianity, a miraculous element and a moral element. The former gave the necessary initial impetus, the latter made the movement endure. In addition to these two powerful causes was the greatest cause of all,—the assertion by Jesus of love as the principle that should underlie the whole conduct of life. The Greek and Roman philosophers had made justice this underlying principle. But justice is an abstraction not to be understood by the people, or always by the philosophers themselves. Every one, on the other hand, can understand the love which Jesus taught as the greatest of all commandments, and, while he may see in it a counsel of perfection, can recognise aspiration towards that perfection as an essential feature in human progress.

WILLIAM G. HUTCHISON.

LONDON, *October* 1897.

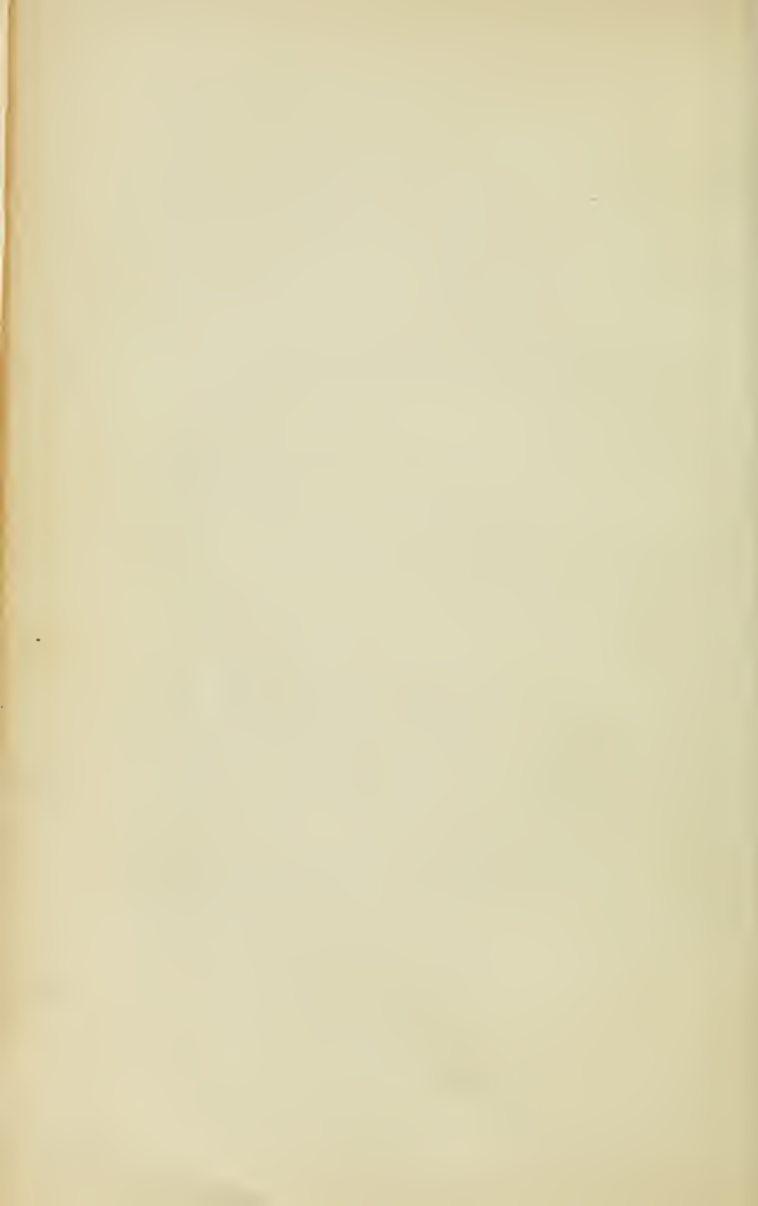
RENAN'S LIFE OF JESUS.



TO THE PURE SOUL OF MY  
SISTER HENRIETTE,

WHO DIED AT BYBLOS, 24TH OF SEPTEMBER 1861.

*Do you remember, in the bosom of God where you are now at rest, those long days at Ghazir, where, alone with you, I wrote these pages which drew their inspiration from the places we had visited together? Sitting silently by my side, you read over every page and copied it as soon as written; at our feet stretched the sea, the villages, the ravines, and the mountains. When the overpowering light of day had given place to the unnumbered army of the stars, your thoughtful doubts led me back to the sublime object of our common thoughts. One day you told me that you would love this book, because it had been written with you, and also because it was after your own heart. If, at times, you feared for it the narrow judgments of the man of frivolous mind, you were always full of assurance that truly religious souls would end by finding pleasure in it. In the midst of these sweet meditations the Angel of Death smote both of us with his pinion; the slumber of fever seized us at the self-same hour; I awakened alone. Now you sleep in the land of Adonis, near holy Byblos and the sacred waters whither the women of the ancient mysteries were wont to come and mingle their tears. O my good genius, reveal to me whom you loved, these verities that have kingship over death, that shield us from the dread of it, that almost make us love it!*



# LIFE OF JESUS.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE PLACE OF JESUS IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD.

THE principal event in the history of the world is the revolution by which the noblest portions of humanity have forsaken the ancient religions, which are classed together under the vague name of Paganism, for a religion founded on the Divine Unity, the Trinity, and the Incarnation of the Son of God. Nearly a thousand years were required to achieve this conversion. The new religion itself took at least three hundred years in its formation. But the origin of the revolution in question is a historical event which happened in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. At that time there lived a man of supreme personality, who, by his bold originality, and by the love which he was able to inspire, became the object, and settled the direction, of the future faith of mankind.

As soon as man grew distinct from the animal he became religious—that is to say, he saw in nature something beyond reality, and, for himself, something beyond death. This feeling, during some thousands of years, went through the strangest vicissitudes. In many races it did not pass

beyond belief in sorcerers, under the gross form in which it is still to be found in certain parts of Oceania. Among some peoples religious feeling degenerated into the shameful scenes of butchery which characterised the ancient religion of Mexico. Other nations, especially in Africa, have never emerged from pure fetichism—that is, the adoration of a material object to which supernatural powers are attributed. Like the instinct of love, which at times raises the most vulgar man above himself, yet occasionally becomes perverted and ferocious, so this divine religious faculty during long periods may seem to be nothing but a cancer which must be extirpated from the human race, a cause of errors and crimes which the wise should endeavour to suppress.

The brilliant civilisations which were developed in a very remote antiquity in China, in Babylonia, and in Egypt, effected a certain progress in religion. China soon reached a kind of mediocre good sense, which prevented great extravagances. She knew neither the advantages nor the abuses of the religious spirit. At all events, she had not in this matter any influence in directing the great current of humanity. The religions of Babylonia and Syria were never wholly liberated from a substratum of strange sensuality; these religions remained, until their extinction in the fourth and fifth centuries of our era, schools of immorality, in which at times glimpses of the divine world were gained by a sort of poetic intuition. Egypt, despite an apparent fetichism, had, at a very early date, metaphysical dogmas and a lofty symbolism. But, doubtless, these interpretations of a refined theology were not primitive. Man has never, when in possession of a clearly conceived idea, amused himself by clothing it in symbols: most often it is after long reflection that, forced by the impossibility felt by



the human mind of resigning itself to the absurd, we seek ideas under ancient mystic images the meaning of which has been lost. Moreover, it is not from Egypt that the faith of mankind has emerged. The elements in the Christian religion which, passing through a thousand transformations, have come from Egypt and Syria, are external forms of little consequence, or dross which even the most purified forms of worship always retain. The great defect of the religions of which we speak was their essentially superstitious character. They only cast into the world millions of amulets and charms. No great moral thought could proceed from races oppressed by secular despotism, and accustomed to institutions which precluded almost all exercise of individual liberty.

The poetry of the soul, faith, liberty, rectitude and devotion, made their appearance in the world with the two great races which, in one sense, have made humanity what it is—the Indo-European and the Semitic races. The first religious intuitions of the Indo-European race were essentially naturalistic. But it was a profound and moral naturalism, a loving union of man with nature, a sweet poetry, full of feeling for the infinite—the principle, in short, of all that the Teutonic and Celtic genius, of all that a Shakespeare and a Goethe were in later days to express. It was neither religion nor ethical philosophy—it was compounded of melancholy, of tenderness, of imagination, above all else, of earnestness, the essential condition of morality and religion. But the faith of mankind could not have proceeded thence, since these ancient forms of worship had great difficulty in detaching themselves from polytheism, and did not attain to any very clear confession of belief. Brahminism has only survived to the present day by

reason of the extraordinary faculty of conservation which India seems to possess. Buddhism failed in all its approaches towards the West. Druidism remained an exclusively national form of worship, without universal bearing. The Greek attempts at reform—Orpheism, the Mysteries—did not suffice to give solid nurture to the soul. Persia alone succeeded in making a religion that was dogmatic, almost monotheistic, and skilfully organised; but it is quite possible that this organisation itself was but an imitation, or borrowed. At all events, Persia has not converted the world; she herself, on the contrary, was converted when she saw the banner of divine unity as proclaimed by Islam appear on her frontiers.

It is the Semitic race<sup>1</sup> which has the glory of having created the religion of mankind. Far beyond the confines of history, resting in his tent free from the taint of a corrupted world, the Bedouin patriarch was preparing the faith of the whole world. A strong antipathy to the voluptuous worships of Syria, a grand simplicity of ritual, a complete absence of temples, and the idol reduced to insignificant *theraphim*, constituted his superiority. Amongst all the tribes of the nomadic Semites, that of the Beni-Israel was already marked out for immense destinies. Ancient relations with Egypt, whence resulted some elements the extent of which it is difficult to estimate, did but augment their repulsion to idolatry. A "Law" or *Thora*, written at a very early date on tables

<sup>1</sup> I remind the reader that this word simply designates here the people who speak or have spoken one of the languages called Semitic. Such a designation is entirely defective; but it is one of those terms, like "Gothic architecture," "Arabic numerals," which we must preserve to be understood, even after we have demonstrated the errors they imply.

of stone, which they attributed to their great liberator Moses, had already become the code of monotheism, and contained, as compared with the institutions of Egypt and Chaldea, powerful germs of social equality and morality. A portable ark, surmounted by a sphinx and having staples on each side through which bearing poles were passed, constituted all their religious apparatus; within it were deposited the sacred objects of the nation, its relics, its memorials, and lastly the "book," the journal of the tribe, always open, but to which additions were made with great discretion. The family charged with the duty of bearing the ark and watching over the portable archives, being near the book and having control over it, very soon became of importance.

The institution which was to decide the future did not come, however, from this source. The Hebrew priest did not differ greatly from the other priests of antiquity. The characteristic which essentially distinguishes Israel among theocratic peoples is, that her priesthood has always been subordinated to individual inspiration. Besides its priests, each nomadic tribe had its *nabi* or prophet, a kind of living oracle who was consulted for the solution of obscure questions supposed to require a high degree of clairvoyance. The *nabis* of Israel, organised in groups or schools, had great power. As defenders of the ancient democratic spirit, enemies of the rich, opponents of all political organisation, and of whatsoever might draw Israel into the paths of other nations, they were the true instruments of the religious pre-eminence of the Jewish people. At a very early date they expressed unlimited hopes, and when the people, in part the victims of their impolitic counsels, had been crushed by the Assyrian power, they proclaimed

that a limitless kingdom was reserved for Judah, that one day Jerusalem would be the capital of the whole world, and that the entire human race would become Jews. Jerusalem with its temple appeared to them as a city set on the summit of a mountain, towards which all peoples should turn, as to an oracle whence the universal law should be proclaimed, as to the centre of an ideal kingdom, in which the human race, led into peace by Israel, should find once more the joys of paradise.

Strange new utterances already began to make themselves heard, tending to exalt martyrdom and celebrate the power of the "man of sorrows." Respecting one of those sublime sufferers, who, like Jeremiah, stained the streets of Jerusalem with their blood, one of the inspired wrote a song upon the sufferings and triumph of the "servant of God," in which all the prophetic force of the genius of Israel seemed concentrated. "For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness. . . . He was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth: as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth. . . . And they made his grave with the wicked. . . . When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his

days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."<sup>1</sup>

Important modifications were at the same time made in the *Thora*. New texts purporting to represent the true law of Moses, such as Deuteronomy, were produced, and in reality inaugurated a very different spirit from that of the old nomads. Great fanaticism was the dominant feature of this spirit. Furious believers unceasingly instigated violence against everything swerving from the worship of Jehovah, and succeeded in establishing a code of blood, in which death was the penalty for religious offences. Piety almost always brings singular contradictions of vehemence and mildness. This zeal, unknown to the coarser simplicity of the time of the Judges, inspired tones of moving eloquence and tender unction, such as, till then, the world had never heard. A strong inclination for social questions already made itself felt; Utopias, dreams of a perfect society, took their place in the code. The Pentateuch, a medley of patriarchal morality and ardent devotion, primitive intuitions and pious subtleties, like those that filled the souls of Hezekiah, of Josiah, and of Jeremiah, was thus consolidated in the form in which we now see it, and for ages became the absolute law of the national spirit.

This great book once created, the history of the Jewish people unfolded itself with irresistible force. The great empires which succeeded each other in Western Asia, by annihilating all its hopes of a terrestrial kingdom, cast it back on religious dreams, which it cherished with a kind of sombre passion. Caring but little for the national dynasty or political independence, it accepted all governments which left it free to practise its worship and follow its usages.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah liii. 2-10.

Israel was henceforward to have no other guidance than that of its religious enthusiasts, no other enemies than those of the Divine unity, no other fatherland than its Law.

And this Law, it must be noted, was entirely social and moral. It was the work of men permeated with a lofty ideal of the present life, and with the belief that they had found the best means of realising it. The conviction of all was that the *Thora*, properly observed, could not fail to give perfect felicity. This *Thora* has nothing in common with the Greek or Roman "Laws," which, dealing with hardly anything but abstract right, enter little into questions of private happiness and morality. We feel beforehand that the results which will follow the Jewish law will be of a social and not a political order, that the work at which this people labours is a kingdom of God, not a civil commonwealth; a universal institution, not a nationality or a country.

Despite numerous failures, Israel admirably sustained this vocation. A series of pious men, Ezra, Nehemiah, Onias, the Maccabees, consumed with zeal for the Law, succeeded each other in defence of ancient institutions. The idea that Israel was a holy people, a tribe chosen by God and bound to him by covenant, took deeper and firmer root. An immense expectation filled their souls. The whole of Indo-European antiquity had placed paradise in the beginning of things; all its poets had wept a golden age that had passed away. Israel placed the age of gold in the future. The Psalms, the eternal poesy of religious souls, blossomed from this exalted piety, with their divine and melancholy harmonies. Israel became truly and specially the people of God, whilst around about her the pagan religions decayed more and more, in Persia and Babylonia to an official

charlatanism, in Egypt and Syria to a gross idolatry, and in the Greek and Roman world to mere parade. What the Christian martyrs effected in the first centuries of our era, what the victims of persecuting orthodoxy have effected in the very bosom of Christianity up to our own time, the Jews effected during the two centuries preceding the Christian era. They were a living protest against superstition and religious materialism. An extraordinary movement of ideas, leading up to the most antagonistic results, made them, at this epoch, the most striking and original people in the world. Their dispersion along all the Mediterranean coast, and the use of the Greek language, which they adopted when out of Palestine, prepared the way for a propagandism, of which ancient societies, divided as they were into small nationalities, had till then offered no example.

Up to the time of the Maccabees, Judaism, in spite of its persistence in announcing that one day it would be the religion of the human race, had had the characteristic of all the other religions of antiquity; it was a family and tribal religion. The Israelite thought, indeed, that his worship was the best, and spoke with contempt of strange gods; but he also believed that the religion of the true God was made for himself alone. Only when a man entered into the Jewish family did he embrace the worship of Jehovah. No Israelite dreamed of converting a stranger to a worship which was the patrimony of the sons of Abraham. The development of the pietistic spirit, after Ezra and Nehemiah, led to a much firmer and more logical conception. Judaism became the true religion in an absolute sense; to all who wished, the right of entering it was given, and it soon became a work of piety to bring into it the greatest number

possible. No doubt the generous feeling which raised John the Baptist, Jesus, and St. Paul above petty ideas of race, was not yet existent; for, by a strange contradiction, these converts, or proselytes, were little respected and were treated with disdain. But the idea of a sovereign religion, the idea that there is in the world something higher than country, than blood, than laws—the idea that makes apostles and martyrs—was founded. Profound pity for pagans, however brilliant their worldly fortune might be, was henceforth the feeling of every Jew. By a cycle of legends destined to furnish models of inflexible firmness, such as the histories of Daniel and his companions, the mother of the Maccabees and her seven sons, the romance of the racecourse of Alexandria, the guides of the people sought above all to inculcate the idea that virtue consists in fanatical attachment to fixed religious institutions.

The persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes made this idea become a passion, almost a frenzy. It was something very analogous to what happened in the reign of Nero, two hundred and thirty years later. Rage and despair cast believers into the world of visions and dreams. The first apocalypse, the Book of Daniel, appeared. It was like a revival of prophecy, but under a very different form from that of the ancient prophecies, and taking a much wider view of the destinies of the world. The Book of Daniel gave, in a manner, final expression to the Messianic hopes. The Messiah was no longer a king, after the manner of David and Solomon, a theocratic and Mosaic Cyrus; he was a "Son of man" appearing in the clouds—a supernatural being, invested with human form, who was to rule the world and preside over the golden age. Perhaps the *Sosiosh* of Persia, the great prophet who was to come charged with



preparing for the reign of Ormuzd, lent some features to this new ideal. The unknown author of the Book of Daniel had, in any case, a decisive influence on the religious crisis which was about to transform the world. He created the *mise-en-scène* and the technical terms of the new Messianic ideal; and we might apply to him what Jesus said of John the Baptist: "Before him, the prophets; after him, the kingdom of God." A few years later the same ideas came to light again, under the name of the prophet Enoch. Essenism, which seems to have had direct relations with the apocalyptic school, had its birth about the same time, and gave as it were a foretaste of the great system of discipline which was soon to be constituted for the human race.

It need not, however, be supposed that this profoundly religious and soul-stirring movement had special dogmas for its primary impulse, as was the case in all the controversies which have broken forth in the bosom of Christianity. The Jew of this epoch was as little theological as possible. He did not speculate upon the essence of the Deity; beliefs about angels, about the destinies of man, about the divine hypostases, the first germs of which might already be perceived, were free beliefs—meditations, to which each one surrendered himself according to the turn of his mind, but of which a great many people had never heard. Those indeed were the most orthodox who stood aloof from all such personal imaginations and adhered to the simplicity of the Mosaic system. No dogmatic power analogous to that which orthodox Christianity has conferred on the Church then existed. It was only at the beginning of the third century, when Christianity had fallen into the hands of argumentative races, mad with dialectic and metaphysics,

that the fever for definitions commenced which makes the history of the Church the history of one immense controversy. There were disputes also among the Jews—excited schools of thought brought antagonistic solutions to almost all questions under discussion; but in these conflicts, the principal details of which have been preserved in the Talmud, there is not a single word of speculative theology. To observe and maintain the Law, because the Law was just, and because, when faithfully observed, it gave happiness—such was Judaism in entirety. No *credo*, no theoretical symbol. One of the disciples of the boldest Arabic philosophy, Moses Maimonides, was able to become the oracle of the synagogue because he was well versed in canonical law.

The reigns of the last Asmoneans, and that of Herod, saw the excitement wax still greater. They were filled with an uninterrupted succession of religious movements. In the same measure that political power became secularised and passed into the hands of sceptics, the Jewish people lived less and less for the earth, and became more and more absorbed in the strange travail which was labouring within it. The world at large, distracted by other spectacles, had no knowledge of what was taking place in this forgotten corner of the East. Minds abreast of their age were, however, better informed. The tender and clear-sighted Virgil seems to respond, as by a secret echo, to the second Isaiah; the birth of a child casts him into dreams of a universal palingenesis. Such dreams were of common occurrence, and formed a kind of literature which was designated Sibylline. The quite recent establishment of the Empire exalted men's imaginations; the great era of peace on which the world was entering, and that impres-

sion of melancholy sensibility which the mind experiences after long periods of revolution, gave birth on all sides to illimitable hopes.

In Judæa expectation was at its height. Holy persons—among whom legend relates of an aged Simeon, who was said to have held Jesus in his arms, and of Anna, daughter of Phanuel, who was regarded as a prophetess—passed their lives about the temple, fasting, and praying that it might please God not to take them from the world before they had beheld the fulfilment of the hopes of Israel. They felt a powerful presentiment; they were sensible of the approach of something unknown.

This confused medley of clear views and dreams, this alternation of deceptions and hopes, these aspirations, unceasingly driven back by odious reality, found at length their interpretation in the peerless man to whom the universal conscience has decreed the title of Son of God, and that with justice, since he gave religion an impetus greater than that which any other man has been capable of giving—an impetus with which, in all probability, no farther advance will be comparable.

## CHAPTER II.

THE CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH OF JESUS—HIS FIRST  
IMPRESSIONS.

JESUS was born at Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, which before his time was not known to fame. All his life he was called by the name of "the Nazarene," and it is only by a somewhat far-fetched and contradictory hypothesis that, in the legends respecting him, he is described as having been born at Bethlehem. We shall see later the motive for this hypothesis, and how it was the necessary consequence of the Messianic character attributed to Jesus. The precise date of his birth is unknown. It took place in the reign of Augustus, about the Roman year 750, probably some years before the year 1 of the era which all civilised peoples date from the day of his birth.

The name of *Jesus*, which was given him, is *Joshua* in an altered form. It was a very common name; but afterwards people naturally sought for mystical interpretations and an allusion to his character of Saviour in it. It may be that Jesus, like all mystics, exalted himself in this respect. More than one great vocation in history has been discovered thus by a name given to a child without premeditation. Ardent natures never resign themselves to seeing aught of

chance in what concerns them. For them, all has been regulated by God ; and they perceive a sign of the supreme will in the most insignificant circumstances.

The population of Galilee was very much mixed in race, as indeed the name of the country indicated. In the population of the province, in the time of Jesus, there were many who were not Jews (Phœnicians, Syrians, Arabs, and even Greeks). Conversions to Judaism were by no means rare in mixed countries of this kind. It is therefore impossible to discuss here any question of race, and endeavour to ascertain what blood flowed in the veins of him who has contributed most to efface distinctions of blood amongst mankind.

He came from the ranks of the common folk. His father Joseph and his mother Mary were people in humble circumstances, artisans living by their handiwork in the state, so common in the East, which is neither ease nor poverty. The extreme simplicity of life in such countries, by dispensing with the need of comfort, renders the privileges of the man of wealth almost useless, and makes every one voluntarily poor. On the other hand, the total lack of appreciation of art, and all that contributes to the beauty of material life, gives a bare appearance to the house of one who otherwise wants for nothing. Apart from something sordid and repulsive which Islamism bears everywhere with it, the town of Nazareth, in the time of Jesus, did not differ greatly perhaps from what it is to-day. We see the streets, where he played when a child, in the stony paths or little lanes which separate the dwellings from each other. No doubt the house of Joseph much resembled those poor domiciles, lighted only by the doorway, serving at once as workshop, kitchen, and bedroom, and having for furniture a mat, some

cushions on the ground, one or two clay pots, and a painted chest.

The family, whether it was the issue of one or several marriages, was somewhat large. Jesus had brothers and sisters who seem to have been younger than he. They all remained obscure, for it appears that the four men who were called his brothers, and among whom one at least, James, became of great importance in the early years of the development of Christianity, were his cousins-german. Mary, in fact, had a sister, also named Mary, who married a certain Alpheus or Cleophas (these names appear to designate the same person) and was the mother of several sons who were of considerable importance among the first disciples of Jesus. These cousins-german, who adhered to the young Master while his own brothers opposed him, took the title of "brothers of the Lord." The real brothers of Jesus, like their mother, became of note only after his death. Even then their reputation does not appear to have equalled that of their cousins, whose conversion had been more spontaneous, and whose characters seem to have had more originality. Their names were so little known that, when the evangelist puts in the mouth of the men of Nazareth the enumeration of the brothers according to natural relationship, the names of the sons of Cleophas are the first to present themselves to him.

The sisters of Jesus were married at Nazareth, and there he spent the early years of his youth. Nazareth was a small town, situated in a hollow opening broadly at the summit of the group of mountains which shuts in the plain of Esdraelon on the north. The population is now from three to four thousand, and can never have varied much. The cold is sharp in winter, and the climate very healthy. The town, like

all the small Jewish towns at that period, was a group of huts shabbily built, and must have presented that forbidding and poverty-stricken aspect which is still characteristic of villages in the East. The houses, it would seem, did not differ much from those cubes of stone, elegant neither without nor within, which at the present day cover the richest parts of Lebanon, and which, buried as they are amid vines and fig-trees, are, in some respects, very pleasing. The surroundings moreover are charming; and no place in the world could be so well adapted for dreams of perfect happiness. Even in our time Nazareth is still a delightful abode, perhaps the only place in Palestine in which the mind feels relieved of the burden which oppresses it in that land of unparalleled desolation. The people are pleasant and cheerful; the gardens fresh and green. Anthony the Martyr, writing at the end of the sixth century, draws an enchanting picture of the fertility of the neighbourhood, which he compares to Paradise. Some valleys on the western side amply justify his description. The fountain, formerly the centre of the life and gaiety of the little town, is destroyed; its broken channels now contain only a muddy stream. But the beauty of the women who assemble there in the evening—that beauty which was remarked even in the sixth century, and was regarded as a gift of the Virgin Mary—is still preserved in a striking manner. It is the Syrian type in all its languid grace. No doubt Mary was there almost every day, and, with her jar on her shoulder, took her place with the rest of her neighbours who have remained in oblivion. Anthony the Martyr observes that the Jewish women, elsewhere disdainful to Christians, were here full of good feeling. Even now religious hatred is weaker at Nazareth than in the rest of the country.

The view from the town is limited; but if we ascend a little to the plateau, swept by a perpetual breeze, which stands above the highest houses, the landscape is magnificent. On the west stretch the fine outlines of Carmel, terminating in an abrupt spur which seems to run down sheer to the sea. Next, one sees the double summit which towers above Megiddo; the mountains of the country of Shechem, with their holy places of the patriarchal period; the hills of Gilboa, the small picturesque group to which is attached the graceful or terrible recollections of Shunem and of Endor; and Tabor, with its beautiful rounded form, which antiquity compared to a bosom. Through a gap between the mountains of Shunem and Tabor are visible the valley of the Jordan and the high plains of Peræa, which form a continuous line from the eastern side. On the north, the mountains of Safed, stretching towards the sea, conceal St. Jean d'Acre, but leave the Gulf of Khaifa in sight. Such was the horizon of Jesus. This enchanted circle, cradle of the kingdom of God, was for years his world. Indeed, during his whole life he went but little beyond the familiar bounds of his childhood. For yonder, northwards, one can almost see, on the flank of Hermon, Cæsarea-Philippi, his farthest point of advance into the Gentile world; and to the south the less smiling aspect of these Samaritan hills foreshadows the dreariness of Judæa beyond, parched as by a burning wind of desolation and death.

If the world, remaining Christian, but attaining to a better idea of that which constitutes a fitting respect for the beginnings of its religion, should ever wish to replace by authentic holy places the mean and apocryphal sanctuaries to which the piety of less enlightened ages was



attached, it is upon this mountain height of Nazareth that it would build its temple anew. There, at the birthplace of Christianity, and in the centre of the deeds of its Founder, ought the great church to be raised in which all Christians should worship. Here, too, on this spot where Joseph the carpenter sleeps with thousands of forgotten Nazarenes who never passed beyond the horizon of their valley, the philosopher would find a place, better than any in the world beside, to contemplate human affairs in their courses, to console himself for their incertitude, and to win fresh assurance of the divine end which the world pursues through innumerable falterings and despite the vanity of all things.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE EDUCATION OF JESUS.

THESE natural surroundings, at once smiling and impressive, formed the whole education of Jesus. No doubt he learnt to read and write according to the Eastern method, which consists in putting in the child's hands a book, which he repeats in cadence with his little comrades, until he knows it by heart. It is doubtful, however, if he fully understood the Hebrew writings in their original tongue. His biographers make him cite them according to translations in the Aramean language; his exegetical principles, so far as we can judge of them from his disciples, much resembled those then in vogue, which represent the spirit of the *Targummim* and the *Midrashim*.

The schoolmaster in small Jewish towns was the *hazzan*, or reader in the synagogues. Jesus frequented but little the higher schools of the Scribes or *Soferim*. There were perhaps none in Nazareth, and he was not possessed of any of those titles which, in the eyes of the vulgar, confer the privileges of knowledge. Nevertheless, it would be a great error to imagine that Jesus was what we should call an ignorant man. Amongst us scholastic education draws a great distinction, in respect of personal worth, between those who have received it and those who have not had the

opportunity. It was not so in the East, or indeed anywhere in the good old times. The state of ignorance in which, owing to our isolated and entirely individualistic way of living, those amongst us remain who have not passed through the schools is unknown in those societies where moral culture, and, above all, the general spirit of the age, are transmitted by the perpetual contact of man with man. The Arab who has never had a teacher is often nevertheless a man of great distinction; for the tent is a kind of school always open, where, from the intercourse of well-bred men, is produced a great intellectual, even literary, movement. Refinement of manners and acuteness of intellect have, in the East, nothing in common with what we call education. It is the men of the schools, on the contrary, who are considered as being pedantic and wanting in manners. In a social state such as this, ignorance, which with us condemns a man to an inferior position, is the condition of great things and of high originality.

In all probability Jesus did not know Greek. The language was spread but little in Judæa beyond the classes who took part in the Government, and the towns inhabited by pagans, like Cæsarea. The real mother-tongue of Jesus was the Syrian dialect mingled with Hebrew, which was then spoken in Palestine. Still less is it probable that he had any acquaintance with Greek culture. Such culture was proscribed by the doctors of Palestine, who included in the same curse "him who rears swine, and him who teaches his son Greek science." In any case it had not penetrated into little towns like Nazareth. It is true that, notwithstanding the anathema of the doctors, some Jews had already embraced Hellenic culture. Apart from the Jewish school of Egypt, in which attempts to amalgamate Hellenism

and Judaism had been continued for nearly two hundred years, a Jew, Nicholas of Damascus, had become, even at this time, one of the most distinguished, one of the best informed, and one of the most respected men of his age. Josephus was soon to furnish another example of a Jew completely Hellenised. But Nicholas was only a Jew in blood. Josephus declares himself to have been an exception among his contemporaries; and the whole schismatic school of Egypt was so far detached from Jerusalem, that we do not find the least allusion to it either in the Talmud or in Jewish tradition. What is certain is, that Greek was very little studied at Jerusalem; Greek studies were regarded as dangerous, and even servile, and at best considered as a mere womanly accomplishment. The study of the Law was alone accounted liberal and worthy a serious man's attention. Questioned as to the time at which it would be right to teach children "the wisdom of the Greeks," a learned Rabbi answered, "At the time which is neither day nor night; since it is written of the Law, Thou shalt study it day and night."

Neither directly nor indirectly, then, did any element of secular teaching reach Jesus. He was ignorant of all beyond Judaism; his mind kept that free innocence which an extended and varied culture always weakens. In the very bosom of Judaism he remained a stranger to many efforts often moving on the same lines as his own. On the one hand, the ascetic life of the Essenes or the Therapeutæ; on the other, the fine speculations in religious philosophy made by the Jewish school at Alexandria, of which Philo, his contemporary, was the ingenious interpreter, were unknown to him. The frequent resemblances to be found between him and Philo, those excellent maxims

about the love of God, charity, rest in God, which seem as it were to echo between the Gospel and the writings of the illustrious Alexandrian thinker, are derived from the common tendencies, inspired by the necessities of the age in all lofty minds.

Happily for him, he was also ignorant of the grotesque scholasticism which was taught at Jerusalem, and was soon to constitute the Talmud. If some Pharisees had already imported it into Galilee, he did not associate with them, and when, in later life, he encountered this foolish casuistry, it only filled him with disgust. It may well be conjectured, however, that the principles of Hillel were not unknown to him. Hillel, fifty years before him, had given utterance to aphorisms presenting many analogies to his own. By his meekly endured poverty, by the sweetness of his character, by his opposition to priests and hypocrites, Hillel was the true master of Jesus, if indeed it be permitted to speak of a master in connection with one of such high originality as the latter.

The reading of the books of the Old Testament made much more impression upon him. The canon of the holy books was composed of two chief parts—the Law, that is to say the Pentateuch, and the Prophets, such as we now possess them. A vast allegorical exegesis was applied to all these books, with the purpose of drawing from them something that was not in them, but which answered to the aspirations of the age. The Law, which represented not the ancient laws of the country, but rather Utopias, the factitious laws and pious frauds of the period of the pietistic kings, had become, since the nation had ceased to govern itself, an inexhaustible theme for subtle interpretations. As to the Prophets and the Psalms, the popular belief was that

almost all the somewhat mysterious traits in these books referred to the Messiah; and people sought to find in them the type of him who should realise the hopes of the nation. Jesus participated in the taste which every one possessed for these allegorical interpretations. But the true poetry of the Bible, which escaped the puerile exegetists of Jerusalem, was fully revealed to his great genius. The Law does not appear to have had much charm for him: he believed that he could do better. But the religious poetry of the Psalms was in marvellous accordance with his lyrical soul; all his life they were his sustenance and his support. The prophets—Isaiah in particular, and his successor in the epoch of the captivity—with their brilliant dreams of the future, their impetuous eloquence, and their invectives mingled with enchanting imagery, were his real masters. No doubt, he also read many apocryphal works—that is to say somewhat modern writings, the authors of which, to give themselves an authority only accorded to very ancient scriptures, had sheltered themselves under the names of prophets and patriarchs. One of these books especially attracted him, namely the book of Daniel. This book, written by an impassioned Jew of the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and attached by him to the name of an ancient sage, formed a *résumé* of the spirit of those later times. Its author, the true creator of the philosophy of history, was the first who dared to see in the general progress of the world and the succession of its empires, only a purpose subordinate to the destinies of the Jewish people. Early in life Jesus was possessed by these high hopes. Perhaps, too, he had read the books of Enoch, then held in equal reverence with the sacred books, and the other writings of the same kind which kept the popular imagination so

active. The advent of the Messiah, with his glories and his terrors—the nations crumbling down to ruin on one another, the cataclysm of heaven and earth,—in such ideas his imagination found constant sustenance; and, as these revolutions were proclaimed to be at hand, and a great number of persons endeavoured to prognosticate the time when they should come to pass, the supernatural state of feeling into which such visions transport us, appeared to him from the first as being perfectly natural and simple.

That he had no knowledge of the general state of the world is evident from every feature of his most authentic discourses. To him the earth appeared to be still divided into kingdoms warring with one another; he seemed to be ignorant of the “Roman peace” and the new state of society which was inaugurated in his time. He had no precise idea of the Roman power; the name of “Cæsar” alone reached him. He saw, in course of construction, in Galilee or its environs, Tiberias, Julias, Diocæsarea, Cæsarea, stately works of the Herods who sought, by erecting these magnificent buildings, to prove their admiration for Roman civilisation, and their devotion towards the members of the family of Augustus, whose names, by a caprice of fate, now serve, grotesquely altered, to designate miserable Bedouin hamlets. Probably he also saw Sebaste, the work of Herod the Great, a showy city, the ruins of which would lead one to believe that it had been brought to its site ready made, like a machine which had only to be put together and set up. This ostentatious piece of architecture which arrived in Judæa by ship-loads, these hundreds of columns, all of uniform diameter, the ornament of some insipid “*Rue de Rivoli*”—these were what he called “the kingdoms of the world and all their glory.” But this auto-

cratic luxuriousness, this administrative and official art, displeased him. What he loved were his Galilean villages, confused masses of huts, of nests and holes cut in the rocks, of wells, of tombs, of fig-trees, and of olives. He always clung close to nature. The courts of kings appeared to him as places where people wear fine clothes. The charming impossibilities of which his parables are full, when he brings kings and the mighty ones of the earth into the story, prove that he never conceived of aristocratic society, save as a young villager who sees the world through the prism of his simplicity.

Still less had he any knowledge of the new idea, created by Hellenic science, and fully confirmed by modern thought, which is the basis of all philosophy, to wit, the exclusion of the supernatural forces, to which the simple belief of early times attributed the government of the universe. Almost a century before him, Lucretius had admirably expressed the immutability of the general system of nature. The negation of miracle—the idea that everything in the world is caused by laws in which the personal intervention of higher beings has no part—was universally admitted in the great schools of all the countries which had accepted Greek science. Perhaps even Babylon and Persia were not strangers to it. Of this progress Jesus knew nothing. Although born at a time when the principles of positive science had already been proclaimed, he lived entirely in supernatural ideas. Never, perhaps, had the Jews been more possessed with the thirst for the marvellous. Philo, who dwelt in a great intellectual centre and had received a very thorough education, possessed only a chimerical and valueless knowledge of science.

On this point Jesus differed in no respect from his



countrymen. He believed in the devil, whom he figured as a kind of evil genius, and he imagined, like everybody else, that nervous diseases were caused by demons who possessed the patient and agitated him. To him the marvellous was not the exceptional but the normal state of things. The idea of the impossibilities of the supernatural is coincident with the beginnings of the experimental science of nature. The man who is destitute of any notion of physical laws, who believes that by praying he can change the clouds in their courses, stay disease and even death, finds nothing extraordinary in miracle, since to him the whole course of things is the result of the free will of the Deity. This intellectual state was that of Jesus during all his life. But in his great soul such a belief produced effects altogether opposed to those produced on men of vulgar mind. In the latter, belief in the special intervention of God caused a foolish credulity and the deceptions of charlatans. In his case it led to a profound conception of the close relations of man with God, and to an exaggerated belief in the power of man—beautiful delusions, which were the secret of his strength; for, if they were one day to be the means of laying him open to the criticism of the physicist and the chemist, they gave him an influence over his own age such as no individual before his time had, or since has, possessed.

His distinctive character showed itself while he was still very young. Legend delights to reveal him, even in his childhood, in revolt against paternal authority, and forsaking the commonplace ways of life to fulfil his mission. It is at least certain that relations of kinship were of little account to him. His family do not seem to have loved him and at times he appears to have been harsh towards them.

Jesus, like all men exclusively possessed by one idea, came to think lightly of the ties of blood. The bond of thought is the only one recognised by natures such as his. "Behold my mother and my brethren!" he said, stretching forth his hand towards his disciples; "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."<sup>1</sup> The simple people did not understand his meaning thus, and one day a woman passing near him cried out, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts which thou didst suck." But he said, "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."<sup>2</sup> Soon, in his bold revolt against nature, he was to go still further; and we shall see him trampling under foot all that is human—ties of blood, love, and country, keeping soul and heart only for the idea which presented itself to him as the absolute form of righteousness and truth.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii. 49, 50.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xi. 27, 28.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE ORDER OF THOUGHT WHICH SURROUNDED THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF JESUS.

As the earth in its cooled state no longer permits us to understand the phenomena of primitive creation, because the fire which transfused it is extinct, so there is always a certain insufficiency in historical explanations, when our timid methods of investigation are applied to the revolutions of the epochs of creation which have decided the fate of humanity. Jesus lived at one of those periods when the game of public life is freely played, and when the stake of human activity is increased a hundredfold. Every great *rôle* then entails death; for such movements imply liberty and an absence of preventive measures, which cannot exist without terrible alternatives. In days such as our own, man risks little and gains little. In heroic periods of human activity, man risks all and gains all. The good and the wicked, or at least those who believe themselves and are believed to be such, form opposing armies. The apotheosis is reached by the scaffold; characters have distinctive features, which engrave them as eternal types in the memory of men. Apart from the French Revolution, no historical environment was so suitable as that in which Jesus was formed, to develop those hidden forces held by

mankind, as it were in reserve, which are only visible in days of fevered excitement and peril.

If the government of the world were a speculative problem, and the greatest philosopher were the man best fitted to tell his fellows what they ought to believe, it would be from quietude and reflection that those great moral and dogmatic truths called religions would proceed. But it is not so. Sakyamuni excepted, great religious founders have not been metaphysicians. Buddhism itself, which had its origin indeed in pure thought, conquered one half of Asia for motives that were wholly political and moral. As to the Semitic religions, they are as little philosophical as they well can be. Moses and Mahomet were not men of speculative tendencies; they were men of action. It was by proposing action to their fellow-countrymen and their contemporaries that they governed mankind. In like manner Jesus was not a theologian or a philosopher, with a more or less well constructed system. To be a disciple of Jesus it was not necessary to sign any formulary, or to profess any confession of faith; one thing alone was needful—to be attached to him, to love him. He never argued about God, for he felt him directly in himself. The rock of metaphysical subtleties against which Christianity broke from the third century onwards, was in nowise created by the founder. Jesus had neither dogma nor system, but a fixed personal resolution, which, exceeding in intensity every other created will, governs to this hour the destinies of humanity.

The Jewish people from the Babylonian captivity up to the Middle Ages had the advantage of being in a state of high tension. That is why the interpreters of the spirit of the nation, during that long period, seemed to write under the influence of a burning fever, which placed them con-

stantly either above or below reason, rarely in its *via media*. Never did man seize the problem of the future and of his destiny with a more desperate courage, a greater determination to realise his possibilities to the utmost. Implicating the fate of mankind with that of their own little race, Jewish thinkers were the first to seek for a general theory of the progress of our species. Greece, always confined within its own bounds, and solely attentive to the petty quarrels of its rival cities, had admirable historians; but before the Roman epoch it would be vain to seek in classical literature for a general system of historical philosophy embracing all humanity. The Jew, on the other hand, thanks to a kind of prophetic sense which renders the Semite at times marvellously fitted to behold the great lines of the future, has made history enter into religion. Perhaps he owes a little of this spirit to Persia. Persia, from an ancient period, conceived of the history of the world as a series of evolutions, over each of which has presided a prophet. Each prophet has had his *hazar*, or reign of a thousand years (chiliasm), and of these successive ages, analogous to the millions of ages unrolled with each Buddha in India, is formed the course of events which prepare for the reign of Ormuzd. At the end of time, when the cycle of chiliasms shall be exhausted, the final paradise will come. Then men will live happy; the earth will be as one plain; there will be only one language, one law, and one government for all. But this future state will be preceded by terrible calamities. Dahak (the Persian Satan) will break his chains and fall upon the world. Two prophets will come to console mankind, and to prepare for the great advent. These ideas ran through the world, and even reached Rome, where they inspired a cycle of prophetic poems, the fundamental ideas

of which were the division of the history of mankind into periods, the succession of the gods corresponding to these periods, a complete renewal of the world, and the final advent of a golden age. The book of Daniel and certain parts of the book of Enoch and of the Sibylline books form the Jewish expression of the same theory. It certainly cannot be maintained that these ideas were held by all. At first they were only embraced by a few men of lively imagination, who felt an inclination towards Gentile doctrines. The narrow-minded and tedious author of the book of Esther never thought of the rest of the world, except to despise it and wish it evil. The disillusioned Epicurean who wrote Ecclesiastes thought so little of the future that he even considered it useless to labour for one's children; in the eyes of this egoistical celibate, the highest wisdom is to exhaust one's fortune in one's own enjoyment. But the great achievements of a people are generally due to the minority. Notwithstanding all their immense faults of character, hard, egoistical, scoffing, cruel, narrow, subtle, and sophistical as they were, the Jewish people were the authors of the finest movement of disinterested enthusiasm recorded in history. Opposition always makes for the glory of a country. The greatest men of the nation are often those whom it puts to death. Socrates was the glory of the Athenians, who would not suffer him to live amongst them. Spinoza was the greatest of modern Jews, and the synagogue expelled him with ignominy. Jesus was the glory of the people of Israel, who crucified him.

A mighty dream haunted the Jewish people for centuries, constantly renewing its youth in its decrepitude. Foreign to the theory of individual recompense, which Greece diffused under the name of the immortality of the soul,

Judæa concentrated on her future as a nation all her power of love and longing. She believed that she possessed divine promises of a boundless future; and as the bitter reality, from the ninth century before our era, gave the dominion of the world more and more to mere strength, and brutally crushed these aspirations, she took her stand in the union of the most impossible ideas, and attempted the most extraordinary gyrations. Before the captivity, when the whole earthly future of the nation had vanished, owing to the separation of the northern tribes, men dreamed of the restoration of the house of David, the reconciliation of the two divisions of the people, and the triumph of theocracy and the worship of Jehovah over idolatrous religions. At the epoch of the captivity, a poet, full of harmony, beheld the splendour of a future Jerusalem, to which the peoples and the distant isles should bow down, in colours so enchanting that one might say a ray of light from the eyes of Jesus had come to him from a distance of six centuries.

The victory of Cyrus at one time seemed to realise these aspirations. The grave disciples of the Avesta and the worshippers of Jehovah believed themselves brothers. Persia had succeeded, by banishing the complex *devas* and transforming them into demons (*divs*), in drawing from the old Arian imaginations, which were essentially naturalistic, a species of monotheism. The prophetic tone of many of the teachings of Iran had much analogy with certain compositions of Hosea and Isaiah. Israel was at rest under the Achemenidæ, and under Xerxes (Ahasuerus) made herself feared by the Iranians themselves. But the triumphant and often cruel entrance of Greek and Roman civilisation into Asia cast her back upon her dreams. More than ever she invoked the Messiah as judge and avenger of the

peoples. A complete regeneration, a revolution shaking the whole world to its very foundation, was necessary to satisfy the mighty thirst for vengeance excited in her by the sense of her superiority, and by the sight of her humiliation.

Had Israel possessed the so-called spiritual doctrine which divides man into two parts—the body and the soul—and finds it quite natural that, while the body decays, the soul should survive, this paroxysm of rage and of energetic protest would have had no reason to exist. But such a doctrine, a product of Greek philosophy, did not accord with the traditions of the Jewish mind. The ancient Hebrew writings contain no trace of future rewards or punishments. Whilst the idea of tribal solidarity existed, it was natural that a strict retribution according to individual merits should not be imagined. So much the worse for the pious man who happened to live at an epoch of impiety; like the others, he suffered the public misfortunes consequent on the general irreligion. This doctrine, bequeathed by the sages of the patriarchal era, constantly resulted in unsustainable contradictions. Already at the time of Job it was much shaken; the old men of Teman who professed it were behind the age, and the young Elihu, who intervened in order to combat them, dared to utter as his first word the essentially revolutionary sentiment, “It is not the great that are wise, nor the aged that understand judgment.”<sup>1</sup> With the complications which had taken place in the world since the time of Alexander, the old Temanite and Mosaic principle had grown still more intolerable. Never had Israel been more faithful to the Law, and yet she had been subjected to the atrocious persecution of Antiochus. Only a

<sup>1</sup> Job xxxii. 9.



rhetorician, accustomed to repeat old phrases grown meaningless, could dare to assert that these evils proceeded from the unfaithfulness of the people. What! those victims who died for their faith, those heroic Maccabees, that mother with her seven sons—will Jehovah forget them eternally, abandon them to the corruption of the grave? Possibly a worldly and incredulous Sadducee might not recoil before such a deduction, and a consummate sage, like Antigonus of Soco, might well maintain that we must not practise virtue like slaves expecting a recompense, that we must be virtuous without hope. But the mass of the people could not be contented with this. Some, adopting the principle of philosophical immortality, imagined the righteous living in the memory of God, glorious for ever in the remembrance of men, and judging the wicked who had persecuted them. "They live in the sight of God . . . they are known of God."<sup>1</sup> That was their reward. Others, especially the Pharisees, had recourse to the doctrine of the resurrection. The righteous will live again to participate in the Messianic kingdom. They will live again in the flesh, confronting a world of which they will be kings and judges; they will behold the triumph of their ideas and the humiliation of their foes.

Among the ancient people of Israel only very slight traces of this fundamental dogma are to be found. The Sadducee, who had no faith in it, was in reality true to the old Jewish doctrine; it was the Pharisee, the believer in the resurrection, who was the innovator. But in religion it is always the zealous party that innovates, that progresses and has influence. And indeed, the resurrection, an idea totally different from that of the immortality of the soul, emerged

<sup>1</sup> Wisdom iv. 1.

very naturally from the ancient doctrines and from the position of the people. Perhaps Persia also furnished some of its elements. At any rate, in combination with the belief in the Messiah, and the doctrine of an approaching renewal of all things, the dogma of the resurrection formed the basis of those apocalyptic theories which, without being articles of faith (the orthodox Sanhedrim of Jerusalem does not appear to have adopted them), pervaded all imaginations, and produced a great fermentation from one end of the Jewish world to the other. The total absence of dogmatic rigour made it possible for very contradictory views to be simultaneously admitted even upon so important a point. Sometimes the righteous man was to await the resurrection; sometimes he was to be received at the moment of death into Abraham's bosom; sometimes the resurrection was to be general; sometimes it was to be reserved for the faithful alone; sometimes it supposed a regenerated world and a new Jerusalem; sometimes it implied a previous annihilation of the universe.

Jesus, as soon as he had any thought of his own, entered into the burning atmosphere which was created in Palestine by the ideas we have just described. These ideas were taught in no school; but they were in the air, and the soul of the young reformer was soon filled with them. Hesitations and doubts, such as we have, never reached him. On the summit of the mountain of Nazareth, where no man can sit to-day without an uneasy, though it may be frivolous, feeling concerning his destiny, Jesus must often have sat unassailed by a single doubt. Unenthralled of selfishness—that source of our troubles which makes us seek with eagerness a reward for virtue beyond the tomb—he thought only of his work, of his race, and of mankind. The moun-

tains, the sea, the blue sky, the lofty plains on the horizon, were for him, not the melancholy vision of a soul that asks of nature the knowledge of its destiny, but the certain symbol, the transparent shadow, of a world invisible and a new heaven.

He never attached much importance to the political events of his time, and probably was little acquainted with them. The court of the Herods was a world so different from his own that he doubtless knew it only by name. Herod the Great died about the year in which Jesus was born, leaving enduring memories, and monuments which must compel posterity, however malevolent it may be, to couple his name with that of Solomon; yet nevertheless his was an incomplete work that could not be continued. The astute Idumean, an ambitious man of secular instincts who found himself lost in a maze of religious controversies, had the advantage which coolness and judgment, untrammelled by morality, give over passionate fanatics. But his idea of a temporal kingdom of Israel, even if it had not been an anachronism, considering the state of the world at the time at which it was conceived, would have miscarried, like the similar scheme devised by Solomon, owing to difficulties due to the character of the nation. His three sons were only satraps of Rome, like the Rajahs of India under English rule. Antipater, or Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Peræa, of whom Jesus was a subject all his life, was an idle and weak prince, a favourite and flatterer of Tiberius, and too often led away by the bad influence of his second wife, Herodias. Philip, tetrarch of Gaulonitis and Batanea, into whose territories Jesus made frequent journeys, was a much better sovereign. As to Archelaus, ethnarch of Jerusalem, he could not have been known by Jesus, who

was about ten years old when this man, who was feeble and without character, though sometimes violent, was dethroned by Augustus. The last trace of autonomy was thus lost to Jerusalem. United to Samaria and Idumea, Judæa formed a kind of dependency of the province of Syria, in which the senator, Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, a well-known consul, was the imperial legate. A series of Roman procurators, subordinate in important matters to the imperial legate of Syria—Coponius, Marcus Ambivius, Annius Rufus, Valerius Gratus, and lastly (in the twenty-sixth year of our era) Pontius Pilate—succeeded each other, and were constantly employed in extinguishing the volcano in eruption beneath their feet.

As a matter of fact, continual seditions, fomented by the zealots of Mosaism, did not cease to agitate Jerusalem during the whole of this period. Death for the seditious was inevitable; but death, when the integrity of the Law was in question, was sought with eagerness. To overthrow the Roman eagle, to destroy the works of art raised by the Herods—in which the Mosaic regulations were not always respected—to rise in revolt against the votive escutcheons set up by the procurators, the inscriptions upon which seemed tainted with idolatry,—these were perpetual temptations to fanatics, who had reached the degree of exaltation that deprives men of every care for life. Judas, son of Sariphea, and Matthias, son of Margaloth, two very famous doctors of the Law, formed against the established order of things a boldly aggressive party, which continued to exist after their execution. The Samaritans were agitated by movements of the same character. It seems as though the Law had never counted a greater number of impassioned votaries than at this time, when he was already alive who,

By the full authority of his genius and by the grandeur of his soul, was about to annul it. The "Zelotes" (*Kenaim*), or "Sicarii," pious assassins who took upon themselves the duty of slaying every one who, in their estimation, broke the Law, began to appear. Representatives of a totally different spirit, the Thaumaturges, who had the reputation of possessing divinity, found believers as a consequence of the imperious craving for the supernatural and the divine which was felt by the age.

A movement which had much more influence upon Jesus was that of Judas the Gaulonite, or Galilean. Of all the exactions to which the country lately conquered by Rome was subjected, the census was the most unpopular. This measure, which always astonishes peoples little accustomed to the requirements of great central administrations, was particularly objectionable to the Jews. Already, under David, we know that a numbering of the people had provoked violent recriminations and the menaces of the prophets. The census, in fact, was the basis of taxation; and taxation, according to the ideas of pure theocracy, was almost an impiety. God being the sole master whom man ought to recognise, to pay tithe to a secular sovereign was, in a measure, to put him in the place of God. Completely foreign to the idea of the State, Jewish theocracy in this matter only acted up to its logical induction—the negation of civil society and of all government. The money in the public treasury was considered stolen money. The census ordered by Quirinius (in the year 6 of the Christian era) led to a strong revival of these ideas and caused a great upheaval. A popular movement began in the northern provinces. Judas, a man belonging to the town of Gamala, upon the eastern shore of the Lake of Tiberias, and a

Pharisee named Sadok, by denying the lawfulness of the tax, gathered round them a numerous party, which soon broke out into open revolt. The fundamental maxims of this school were, that freedom was worth more than life, and that they ought to call no man "master"—that title belonging to God alone. Judas doubtless had many other principles, which Josephus, always careful not to compromise his co-religionists, designedly passes by in silence; for it is impossible to understand how, for so simple an idea, the Jewish historian should accord him a place among the philosophers of his nation, and regard him as the founder of a fourth school on an equality with those of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. Judas was evidently the leader of a Galilean sect, filled with the Messianic idea, which finally became a political movement. The procurator Coponius crushed the Gaulonite's sedition, but the school survived and kept its chiefs. Under the leadership of Menahem, son of the founder, and of a certain Eleazar, his relative, we again find them very active in the last struggles of the Jews against the Romans. It may be that Jesus saw this Judas, whose conception of the Jewish revolution differed so widely from his own; at any rate he knew his school, and it was probably by a reaction from his error that he pronounced his axiom upon the penny of Cæsar. Jesus, in his wisdom far removed from all sedition, profited by the fault of his predecessor, and dreamed of another kingdom and another deliverance.

Galilee was thus a vast furnace wherein the most diverse elements were seething together. An extraordinary contempt for life, or, to be more accurate, a kind of appetite for death, was the result of these agitations. Experience

counts for nothing in great fanatical movements. Algeria, in the early years of the French occupation, saw inspired men, who declared themselves to be invulnerable and sent by God to sweep forth the infidels, arise with every spring; by the following year their death was forgotten, and their successors found no less credence. Though in some respects very stern, the Roman power was as yet but little inclined to be meddlesome, and permitted a good deal of liberty. Those great brutal despotisms, terrible though they might be in repressing sedition, were not so suspicious as are powers which have a dogmatic faith to defend. They permitted every freedom until the day when they thought it necessary to act stringently. It is not recorded that Jesus was even once interfered with by the authorities during the whole of his wandering life. Liberty such as this, and, above all, the happiness which Galilee enjoyed in being much less fettered by the bonds of Pharisaic pedantry, gave that province a real superiority over Jerusalem. The revolution, or, in other words, the expectance of the Messiah, caused there a general activity of thought. Men deemed themselves on the eve of the great renewal of all things; the Scriptures, tortured into divers meanings, fostered the most colossal hopes. In every line of the simple writings of the Old Testament they beheld the assurance, and, in a manner, the programme of the future reign, which was to bring peace to the righteous and to consummate for ever the work of God.

From all time this division into two parties, opposed both in interest and spirit, had been a powerful principle in the moral development of the Hebrew nation. Every people called to high destinies must be of necessity a little world in itself, including opposite poles. In Greece, at a few

leagues' distance from each other, were Sparta and Athens—to a superficial observer the two antipodes, but, in reality, rival sisters, each necessary to the other. It was the same with Judæa. In a sense less brilliant than the development of Jerusalem, that of the North was on the whole much more fertile; the highest achievements of the Jewish people have always proceeded thence. A complete absence of feeling for nature, bordering on harshness, narrowness, and ferocity, has stamped all purely Hierosolymite works with a certain grandeur, but it is a melancholy, sterile, and repellent grandeur. With its solemn doctors, its insipid canonists, its hypocritical and splenetic devotees, Jerusalem would not have conquered humanity. The North has given to the world the simple Shunamite, the humble Canaanite, the impassioned Magdalene, the good foster-father Joseph, and the Virgin Mary. It was the North alone that created Christianity; Jerusalem, on the other hand, was the true home of the stubborn Judaism which, founded by the Pharisees and fixed by the Talmud, has traversed the Middle Ages and come down to us.

A beautiful natural environment tended to produce the much less austere spirit—the less rigidly monotheistic spirit, if I may say so—which imprinted a charming and idyllic character on all the dreams of Galilee. The saddest country in the world is perhaps the region surrounding Jerusalem. Galilee, on the contrary, was a very green, shady, smiling land, the true home of the Song of Songs, and the Songs of the Well-beloved. During the months of March and April, the country is a carpet of flowers of an incomparable variety of colours. The animals are small and extremely gentle—delicate and playful turtle-doves, blackbirds so light that they rest on a blade of grass without



bending it, tufted larks which almost venture under the feet of the traveller, little river tortoises with mild bright eyes, storks of gravely modest mien, which, casting aside all timidity, allow man to come quite near them, and seem indeed to invite his approach. In no country in the world do the mountains extend with more harmonious outlines or inspire higher thoughts. Jesus seems to have had an especial love for them. The most important events of his divine career took place upon the mountains. It was there that he was best inspired; it was there that he had mystic communion with the ancient prophets; and it was there that his transfiguration was revealed to the eyes of his disciples.

This beautiful country now, owing to the impoverishment brought by Turkish Islamism into human life, a land of heart-rending gloom, yet nevertheless, in all that man cannot destroy, breathing an air of freedom and mildness and tenderness, was filled at the time of Jesus with prosperity and gaiety. The Galileans had the reputation of being energetic, brave, and industrious. If we except Tiberias, built in the Roman style by Antipas in honour of Tiberius (about the year 15), Galilee had no large towns. The country was nevertheless very populous, covered with small towns and large villages, and skilfully cultivated in all its parts. From the ruins that remain of its former glories, we can imagine an agricultural people, by no means gifted in art, caring little for luxury, indifferent to the beauties of form, and exclusively idealistic. The country abounded in running streams and in fruits; the large farms were shaded with vines and fig-trees; the gardens were full of apple, walnut, and pomegranate trees. The wine was excellent, if we may judge by that which the Jews still make at Safed, and the people

drank much of it. This contented life of easy satisfaction had no resemblance to the gross materialism of our own peasantry, the coarse enjoyments of agricultural Normandy, or the heavy mirth of the Flemish. It was spiritualised in ethereal dreams by a kind of poetic mysticism, in which heaven and earth were made one. Leave the austere Baptist in his Judæan desert to preach repentance with unceasing invective, and to live on locusts in the company of jackals! Why should the guests of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? Joy will be a part of the kingdom of God. Is she not the daughter of the humble in heart, of men of good will?

The whole history of nascent Christianity has in this way become a delightful pastoral. A Messiah at the marriage feast—the courtesan and the good Zaccheus bidden to his festivals—the founders of the kingdom of heaven like a bridal procession,—that is what Galilee has dared to offer, and to make the world accept. Greece has drawn admirable pictures of human life in sculpture and in poetry, but they are ever without receding backgrounds and distant horizons. In Galilee were wanting the marble, the skilled craftsman, the exquisite and refined language. But Galilee has created the sublimest ideal for the popular imagination; since behind its idyll the destiny of humanity is being decided, and the light which illumines its pictures is the sun of the kingdom of God.

Jesus lived and grew up in these beautiful surroundings. From his childhood he went nearly every year to the feast at Jerusalem. This pilgrimage had a sweet solemnity for provincial Jews. Whole series of psalms were consecrated to celebrating the happiness of thus journeying in family companionship during several Spring days

by hill and dale, every pilgrim eager to behold the splendours of Jerusalem, the dread solemnities of the sacred courts, and to know the joy of brethren dwelling together in unity. The route which Jesus ordinarily took in these journeys was that which is followed to this day through Ginæa and Shechem. From Shechem to Jerusalem the journey is exhausting. But the neighbourhood of the old sanctuaries of Shiloh and Bethel, near which the pilgrims pass, keeps their interest alive. Ain-el-Haramie, the last halting-place, is a spot which possesses a melancholy charm; and there are few impressions which can equal that experienced on encamping there for the night. The valley is narrow and sombre, and a dark stream issues from the crags, full of tombs hewn out of the solid rock, which hem it in. It is, I think, the "valley of weeping," or of dropping waters, described as one of the resting-places by the way in the delightful eighty-fourth Psalm, and forming an emblem of life for the sad sweet mysticism of the Middle Ages. Early the next day the pilgrims would be at Jerusalem; that expectation even now sustains the caravan with hope, making the night short and slumber light.

These pilgrimages, in which the re-united nation exchanged its ideas, were almost always centres of great agitation in thought; and they placed Jesus in contact with the very soul of his people, probably inspiring him whilst still young with a strong antipathy to the failings of the official representatives of Judaism. It is believed that very early in life the wilderness also had some influence on his development, and that he made long sojourns there. But the God he found in the wilderness was not his God. It was rather the God of Job, stern and terrible, accountable to no man. Sometimes Satan came to tempt him. Then he returned

into his beloved Galilee, and once more found his heavenly Father in the midst of green hills and clear fountains—among the women and children, who, with joyous soul and with the song of the angels in their hearts, awaited the salvation of Israel.

## CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST SAYINGS OF JESUS—HIS IDEAS OF A DIVINE FATHER AND OF A PURE RELIGION—HIS FIRST DISCIPLES.

JOSEPH died before his son had taken any part in public affairs. Thus Mary remained the head of the family, and this explains why her son, when it was necessary to distinguish him from many others of the same name, was most frequently called the "son of Mary." It seems that, having, by the death of her husband, been left friendless at Nazareth, she withdrew to Cana, whence originally she may have come. Cana was a small town situated at a distance of from two to two and a half hours' journey from Nazareth, at the foot of the mountains which form the northern boundary of the plain of Asochis. The prospect, less imposing than at Nazareth, extends over the whole plain, and is bounded in a most picturesque manner by the mountains of Nazareth and the hills of Sepphoris. Jesus seems to have lived for some time in this place. Here he probably spent a part of his youth, and it was here that his greatness first revealed itself.

He followed the trade of his father, which was that of a carpenter. In this there was nothing humiliating or irksome. The Jewish custom required that a man devoted to intellectual work should learn a handicraft. The most

celebrated doctors had their trades; thus St. Paul, who was so carefully educated, was a tent-maker. Jesus never married. His whole capacity for love was concentrated upon that which he felt was his heavenly vocation. The extremely delicate feeling towards women which we remark in him was not inconsistent with the exclusive devotion which he had for his ideal. Like Francis of Assisi and Francis of Sales, he treated as sisters the women who devoted themselves to the same work as himself; he had his St. Clare, his Frances of Chantal. But it is probable that they loved him more than they loved the work; he was, no doubt, more beloved than loving. Thus, as often happens in very lofty natures, tenderness of heart was in him transformed into an infinite sweetness, a vague poetry, a universal charm. His relations, free and intimate but of an entirely moral kind, with women of dubious character, are also to be explained by the passion which attached him to the glory of his Father, and made him jealously anxious for all beautiful creatures who could contribute to it.

Through what stages did the ideas of Jesus progress during this obscure period of his life? By what meditations did he enter upon his career as a prophet? On these points we are ignorant, his history having reached us in scattered narratives lacking in chronological exactness. But the development of living personality is everywhere the same; and there can be no doubt that the growth of a character so powerful as that of Jesus obeyed very rigorous laws. A high conception of Divinity, not derived from Judaism, but apparently the creation of his own great mind, was, in some measure, the guiding principle to which his power was due. It is here most essential that we should put aside the ideas

familiar to us, and the discussions in which petty intellects exhaust themselves. Properly to understand the precise character of the piety of Jesus, we must forget all that has come between the Gospel and ourselves. Deism and pantheism have become the two poles of theology. The paltry discussions of scholasticism, the intellectual aridity of Descartes, the deep-rooted irreligion of the eighteenth century, by lessening God, and, in a manner, limiting him by the exclusion of all that is not his very self, have stifled all fertile ideas of the divine in the breast of modern rationalism. If God, in fact, be a personal being external to us, he who believes himself to have peculiar relations with God is a "visionary"; and since the physical and physiological sciences have shown us that all supernatural visions are illusions, the logical deist finds it impossible to understand the great beliefs of ages past. Pantheism, on the other hand, by its suppression of the divine personality, is as far as it can be from the living God of the ancient religions. Were the men who comprehended God best—Sakyamuni, Plato, St. Paul, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Augustine (at some periods of his fluctuating life)—deists or pantheists? Such a question is meaningless. Physical and metaphysical proofs of the existence of God would have been quite indifferent to these great men. They felt the divine within themselves. Jesus must be placed in the front rank of this great family of the true sons of God. Jesus had no visions; God did not speak to him as to one outside of himself; God was in him; he felt himself with God, and from his own heart he drew all that he said of his Father. He dwelt in the bosom of God by constant communion with him; he beheld him not, but he understood him, without having need of the thunder and the burning bush

of Moses, of the revealing tempest of Job, of the oracle of the old Greek sages, of the familiar spirit of Socrates, or of the angel Gabriel of Mahomet. Here we find nothing resembling the imagination and the hallucination of a St. Theresa. The frenzy of the Sufi proclaiming himself one with God is also quite another thing. Jesus never once gave utterance to the sacrilegious idea that he was God. He believed himself to have direct communion with God; he believed himself to be the Son of God. The highest consciousness of God which has ever existed in the heart of man was that of Jesus.

On the other hand, we understand how Jesus, having such a spiritual standpoint at the outset, could never have been a speculative philosopher like Sakyamuni. Nothing is farther from scholastic theology than the Gospel. The speculations of the Greek fathers on the divine essence proceed from an entirely different spirit. God, conceived simply as Father,—such was the whole theology of Jesus. And this was not with him a theoretical principle, a doctrine more or less proved, which he sought to inculcate in others. He did not argue with his disciples; he exacted from them no effort of attention. He did not preach his opinions; he preached himself. Very great and highly disinterested minds often present, associated with much loftiness, those characteristics of perpetual attention to themselves and extreme personal susceptibility which, in general, are peculiar to women. Their conviction that God is in them and perpetually occupies himself with them, is so strong that they have no dread of imposing themselves upon others; our reserve, and our respect for the opinion of others, which is a part of our weakness, could not belong to them. This exaltation of personality is not egoism; for



such men, possessed by their idea, gladly give their lives to consummate their work; it is the identification of self with the object it has embraced, carried to its farthest point. It is considered vainglory by those who see in the new doctrine only the personal fantasy of the founder; but it is the finger of God to those who see the result. Here the fool stands side by side with the inspired man; only the fool never succeeds. It has not yet been given to insanity to influence human progress seriously.

It can hardly be doubted that Jesus did not attain at first to this high affirmation of himself. But it is probable that, from the first, he looked upon his relationship with God as that of a son with his father. Herein was his great originality; in this he had nothing in common with his race. Neither Jew nor Mussulman has understood this sweet theology of love. The God of Jesus is not that relentless master who kills us, or damns us, or saves us according to his good pleasure. The God of Jesus is our Father. We hear him when we listen to the gentle voice that breathes within us, "Abba, Father." The God of Jesus is not the unjust despot who has chosen Israel for his people and specially protects them. He is the God of humanity. Jesus was not a patriot like the Maccabees, or a theocrat like Judas the Gaulonite. Rising fearlessly above the prejudices of his nation, he asserted the universal fatherhood of God. The Gaulonite maintained that a man should rather die than give to any other than God the name of "Master"; Jesus left the title to any one who cared to take it, and for God reserved a dearer name. Whilst he accorded the great ones of the earth, who to him were representatives of power, an ironical respect, he established the supreme consolation—recourse to the Father whom every man has in

heaven—and the true kingdom of God, which every man bears in his heart.

The term “kingdom of God,” or “kingdom of heaven,” was the favourite expression of Jesus to describe the revolution which he inaugurated in the world. Like almost all the Messianic terminology, it came from the book of Daniel. According to the author of that extraordinary work, the four profane empires, destined to ruin, were to be succeeded by a fifth empire which should be that of the saints, and last for ever. This reign of God upon earth naturally lent itself to the most diverse interpretations. To many it was the reign of the Messiah or of a new David; to Jewish theology the “kingdom of God” is most frequently only Judaism itself—the true religion, the monotheistic worship, piety. In the latter part of his life Jesus believed that this reign would be realised in a material form by a sudden regeneration of the world. But probably this was not his first idea. The admirable moral conclusion which he draws from the idea of God as a Father, was not that of the enthusiasts who believed the world was near its end, and by asceticism prepared themselves for a chimerical catastrophe; it is that of a world of men who have lived, and still would live. “The kingdom of God is within you,” said he to those that sought with subtilty for external signs. The realistic conception of the Divine advent was but a cloud, a transient error, which his death has made us forget. The Jesus who founded the true kingdom of God, the kingdom of the humble and meek, was the Jesus of early life—of those chaste and simple days when the voice of his Father re-echoed within him in clearer tones. It was then, for some months, perhaps a year, that God truly dwelt upon earth. The voice of the young carpenter suddenly

acquired a wonderful sweetness. An infinite charm was breathed forth from his person, and those who had seen him up to that time no longer recognised him. As yet he had no disciples, and the group of men which gathered about him was neither a sect nor a school; but already they felt a common spirit, a sweet and permeating influence. His lovable character, accompanied doubtless by one of those beautiful faces occasionally to be seen in the Jewish race, threw around him a circle of fascination from which none in the midst of these kindly and simple people could escape.

Paradise, in fact, would have been brought down to earth, had not the ideas of the young Master far transcended the level of ordinary goodness, above which it has not yet been found possible to raise the human race. The brotherhood of men, as sons of God, and the moral consequences resulting from such a conception, were deduced with exquisite feeling. Like all the rabbis of the time, Jesus was little inclined towards dialectic reasoning, and put his doctrine into concise aphorisms, and into forms of expression which were at times enigmatical and strange. Some of these aphorisms come from the books of the Old Testament. Others were the thoughts of more modern sages, especially of Antigonus of Soco, Jesus son of Sirach, and Hillel, which he learnt, not from learned study, but from their constant popular use as proverbs. The synagogue was rich in very happily expressed maxims which formed a kind of current proverbial literature. Jesus adopted almost all this oral teaching, but imbued it with a higher spirit. Usually exceeding the duties laid down by the Law and the prophets, he desired perfection. All the virtues of humility—forgiveness, charity, abnegation, and self-denial—virtues

which, with good reason, have been called Christian, if by that we mean that they were truly preached by Christ, existed in germ in this first teaching. As to justice, he was content with repeating the well-known axiom: "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them."<sup>1</sup> But this old and somewhat selfish wisdom did not satisfy him. He went to extremes, and said, "Whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."<sup>2</sup> "If thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee."<sup>3</sup> "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you."<sup>4</sup> "Judge not, that ye be not judged."<sup>5</sup> "Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned."<sup>6</sup> "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful."<sup>7</sup> "It is more blessed to give than to receive."<sup>8</sup> "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted."<sup>9</sup>

Concerning alms, pity, good works, kindness, peacefulness, and complete unselfishness of heart, he had little to add to the doctrine of the synagogue. But he placed upon them an emphasis full of impressive grace which gave the old maxims new life. Morality is not a matter of more or less well-expressed principles. The poetry which makes the precept loved is more than the precept itself, regarded as an abstract truth. It cannot be denied that these maxims, borrowed by Jesus from his predecessors, produce quite a

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 39 and following.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. v. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. vii. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Luke vi. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Luke vi. 36.

<sup>8</sup> Acts xx. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. xxiii. 12.

different effect in the Gospel from that in the ancient Law, in the *Pirké Aboth*, or in the Talmud. It is neither the ancient Law nor the Talmud which has conquered and transformed the world. Only slightly original in itself—if by that we mean that it might be reconstructed almost entirely by the aid of more ancient maxims—the morality of the Gospels remains nevertheless the highest creation of the human conscience, the most beautiful code of perfect life that any moralist has ever framed.

Jesus did not speak against the Mosaic law, but it is clear that he saw its insufficiency and let it be seen that he did so. He never ceased to repeat that more must be done than the ancient sages had commanded. He forbade the least harsh word; he prohibited divorce, and all oath-taking; he inveighed against revenge; he condemned usury; he considered sensual desire as criminal as adultery; he desired the universal forgiveness of injuries. The motive on which he based these maxims of exalted charity was always the same—"That ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>1</sup>

A pure worship, a religion without priests and external observances, resting wholly on the feelings of the heart, on the imitation of God, on the close communion of the conscience with the heavenly Father, were the results of these principles. Jesus never shrank from this bold conclusion,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 45 and following.

which made him an indomitable revolutionary in the very heart of Judaism. Why should there be mediators between man and his Father? Since God only sees the heart, to what good end those purifications, those observances relating to the body alone? Even tradition, a thing so sacred to the Jews, is nothing compared with pure feeling. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who, as they prayed, turned their heads to see if they were observed, who gave their alms with ostentation, and put marks upon their garments, that they might be recognised as pious men—all these affectations of false devotion roused his disgust. "They have their reward," said he; "but when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall recompense thee."<sup>1</sup> "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber; and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall recompense thee. And in praying, use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him."<sup>2</sup>

He affected none of the external signs of asceticism, contenting himself with praying, or rather meditating, upon the mountains and in the lonely places, where man has always sought God. This lofty idea of the relations of man with God, of which so few souls, even after him, have been

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vi. 5-8.

capable, was summed up in a prayer which at that time he taught to his disciples :

“Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done as in heaven so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into temptation; but deliver us from the evil one.”<sup>1</sup> He especially insisted upon the idea that the heavenly Father knows better than we what is needful, and that we almost sin against him in asking him for this or that particular thing.

In this Jesus only carried to their logical conclusion the great principles which Judaism had founded, but which the official classes of the nation tended more and more to despise. The Greek and Roman prayers were almost always mere egoistical verbiage. Never had pagan priest said to the faithful, “If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”<sup>2</sup> Alone in antiquity, the Jewish prophets, more especially Isaiah, had, in their hatred for priestcraft, caught a glimpse of the true nature of the worship which man owes to God. “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. . . . Incense is an abomination unto me . . . your hands are full of blood . . . cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment.”<sup>3</sup> In later times certain

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 9 and following.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 23, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah i. 11 and following.

doctors, Simeon the Just, Jesus son of Sirach, and Hillel, almost reached the final position and declared that the Law was, in brief, righteousness. Philo, in the Judæo-Egyptian world, attained, at the same time as Jesus, ideas of high moral sanctity, the consequence of which was indifference to the observances of the Law. Shemaïa and Abtalion also proved themselves more than once to be very liberal casuists. Rabbi Johanan ere long placed works of mercy above even the study of the Law. It was however Jesus alone who proclaimed the principle effectively. Never has there been any one less a priest than Jesus, never a greater enemy to forms, which stifle religion under the pretext of protecting it. In this we are all his disciples and his successors; by this he laid the eternal foundation-stone of true religion; and, if religion be essential to mankind, by this he has merited the divine rank which the world has accorded him. An absolutely new idea, the conception of a worship founded on purity of heart, and on the brotherhood of humanity, through him entered into the world—an idea so lofty that the Christian Church had necessarily to fall short of it, an idea which, in our days, only a few minds are capable of following.

An exquisite feeling for nature furnished him at every moment with vivid images. Sometimes the pointed terseness, which we call wit, adorned his aphorisms; at other times their strength lay in the happy use of popular proverbs. "How wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me cast out the mote out of thine eye; and lo, the beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 4, 5.



These lessons, long hidden in the heart of the young Master, had already brought a few disciples round him. The spirit of the time was favourable to small churches; it was the epoch of the Essenes or Therapeutæ. Rabbis, each having his distinctive teaching, Shemaïa, Abtalion, Hillel, Shammai, Judas the Gaulonite, Gamaliel, and many others, whose maxims form the Talmud, sprang up on every side. Very little was written; the Jewish doctors of this period did not write books; everything was communicated by conversations, and in public teaching to which they sought to give a form that would make it remembered. The day on which the young carpenter of Nazareth first began to proclaim these maxims—maxims for the most part already widely circulated, but, thanks to him, destined to regenerate the world—was therefore no striking event. It was only one Rabbi more (the most fascinating of all, it is true) and around him some young men, eager to hear him, and thirsting for knowledge of the unknown. It requires time to overcome the indifference of men. As yet there were no Christians; but true Christianity was founded, and certainly it was never more perfect than at this first moment of its existence. Jesus added nothing of a lasting nature to it afterwards. Indeed, in one sense, he compromised it; for sacrifices must be made for any idea to succeed; we never come unscathed from the battle of life.

To conceive the good, in fact, does not suffice; we must make it triumph amongst men. To accomplish this, less immaculate paths must be followed. Certainly, if the Gospel were limited to some chapters of Matthew and Luke, it would be more perfect and would not now be open to so many criticisms; but without miracles would it have converted the world? Had Jesus died at the period

we have now reached in his career, there would not have been a single page in his life to wound us; but, while greater in the eyes of God, he would have remained unknown to men; he would have been lost in the multitude of great unknown spirits, who are the best of all spirits; the truth would not have been promulgated, and the world would not have profited from the immense moral grandeur with which his Father had endowed him. Jesus son of Sirach, and Hillel had uttered aphorisms almost as lofty as those of Jesus. But Hillel will never be accounted the true founder of Christianity. In ethics, as in art, precept is nothing, practice is everything. The idea which is hidden in a picture by Raphael is of little moment; it is only the picture itself which counts. So too in ethics, truth is only of value when it becomes more than a mere sentiment, and it does not attain its highest worth until realised in the world as fact. Men of indifferent morality have written very good maxims. Very virtuous men, on the other hand, have done nothing to perpetuate the tradition of virtue in the world. The palm is to him who has been mighty both in words and in works, who has discerned the good, and, at the price of his blood, has made it triumph. Jesus, from this dual point of view, is without equal; his glory retains its integrity, and will ever know renewal.

## CHAPTER VI.

JOHN THE BAPTIST—THE VISIT OF JESUS TO JOHN, AND HIS ABODE IN THE DESERT OF JUDÆA—ADOPTION OF THE BAPTISM OF JOHN.

AN extraordinary man, whose position, for lack of documentary evidence, remains for us to some extent enigmatical, appeared about this time, and unquestionably had some intercourse with Jesus. This intercourse tended somewhat to make the young prophet of Nazareth deviate from his path; but it suggested many important additions to his religious teaching, and, at all events, lent very powerful authority to his disciples in preaching faith in their Master to a certain class of Jews.

About the year 28 of our era (the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius) there spread through the whole of Palestine the reputation of a certain Johanan, or John, a young ascetic full of fervour and passion. John was of the priestly race, and born, it would seem, at Juttah, near Hebron, or at Hebron itself. Hebron, the patriarchal city *par excellence*, situated close to the desert of Judæa, and within a few hours' journey of the great desert of Arabia, was at that period what it is now—one of the bulwarks of Semitic ideas in their austerest form.

From his childhood John was a *Nazir*—that is to say, bound down by vow to certain abstinences. The desert, which was, so to speak, his environment, attracted him early in life. There he led the life of an Indian Yogi, clad only in skins or stuffs of camels' hair, and having for his food locusts and wild honey. A certain number of disciples had gathered around him, sharing his life and meditating on his stern doctrine. We might imagine ourselves transported to the banks of the Ganges, if peculiar traits did not show us in this recluse the last descendant of the great prophets of Israel.

From the time when the Jewish nation had begun to be stricken with a kind of despair by reflecting upon its destiny, the popular imagination had eagerly reverted to the ancient prophets. Now, of all the men of the past, the remembrance of whom came like the dreams of a troubled night to awaken and excite the people, the greatest was Elias. This giant among prophets, in his rude retreat at Carmel, sharing the life of wild beasts, dwelling in the hollows of the rocks, whence he came forth like a thunderbolt, to make and unmake kings, had become by successive transformations a kind of superhuman being, sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, and as one who had not known death. It was generally believed that Elias would return and restore Israel. The austere life which he had led, the terrible memories he had left behind him—memories which still weigh heavily upon the East—that darkly imagined figure which, even in our own time, causes terror and death—all this cycle of legends charged with vengeance and fear, vividly impressed men's minds, and stamped, as with a birth-mark, all the creations of the popular imagination. Whoever aspired to act powerfully upon the people had to imitate

Elias; and, as solitary life had been his essential characteristic, they were wont to conceive "the man of God" as a hermit. They imagined that all holy men had had their days of penitence, of solitude, and of austerity. Withdrawal to the desert thus became the condition of high destinies and their prelude.

No doubt this thought of imitation had greatly exercised John's mind. The idea of anchorite life, so opposed to the spirit of the ancient Jewish people, and to which vows, such as those of the Nazirs and the Rechabites, had no resemblance, was spreading throughout Judæa. The Essenes, or Therapeutæ, were grouped near the birthplace of John, on the eastern shores of the Dead Sea. Abstinence from animal food, wine, and sexual intercourse was regarded as the novitiate of seers. It was imagined that the chiefs of sects ought to be recluses, having rules and institutions of their own, like the founders of religious orders. Some of the teachers of the young were also anchorites, somewhat resembling the *Gurus* of Brahminism. Indeed, might there not be in this a remote influence of the Indian *Munis*? Perhaps some of those wandering Buddhist monks who overran the world, as did the first Franciscans in later times, preaching by their deeds, and converting people who did not know their language, might have turned their steps towards Judæa, as they certainly did in the direction of Syria and Babylon. On this point we are ignorant. Babylon had for some time really been a home of Buddhism. Budasp (Bodhisattva) was reputed to be a wise Chaldean, and the founder of Sabeism. *Sabeism* was, as its etymology indicates, *baptism*—that is to say, the religion of many baptisms, and the source of the sect, still existing, called "Christians of St. John," or Mendaites,

which the Arabs term *el Mogtasila*, "the Baptists." It is very difficult to unravel these vague analogies. The sects floating between Judaism, Christianity, Baptism, and Sabeism, which were to be found in the region beyond the Jordan during the early centuries of our era, by reason of the confused accounts of them which have come down to us, present a most singular problem to criticism. In any case it may be considered that many of the external practices of John, of the Essenes, and of the Jewish spiritual teachers of this period were derived from influences then but recently received from the far East. The fundamental practice which characterised the sect of John and gave it its name, has always had its centre in lower Chaldea, and there constitutes a religion which has survived to the present day.

This practice was baptism, or total immersion. Religious ablutions were already familiar to the Jewish, as they were to all other Eastern religions. Amongst the Essenes they had had a peculiar development. Baptism had become a usual ceremony on the reception of proselytes into the bosom of the Jewish religion, a sort of initiatory rite. Never before John the Baptist, however, had either this importance or this form been given to immersion. John had selected the scene of his activity in that part of the desert of Judæa which is in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. On the occasions when he administered baptism he repaired to the banks of the Jordan, either to Bethany or Bethabara, upon the eastern shore, probably opposite Jericho, or to a place called *Ænon*, or "the Fountains," near Salim, where there was much water. Considerable multitudes, especially of the tribe of Judah, hastened to the place to be baptised by him. Thus in a few months he became one of the most

influential men in Judæa, a man whom the world could not afford to ignore.

The people took him for a prophet, and many imagined that it was Elias who had risen again. Belief in such resurrections was widely spread; it was thought that God would raise from the tomb certain of the ancient prophets to guide Israel towards her final destiny. Others held John to be the Messiah himself, although he made no such pretension. The priests and the Scribes, who were opposed to this revival of prophetism, and ever hostile to enthusiasts, despised him. But the popularity of the Baptist impressed them, and they dared not speak against him. It was a victory gained by popular sentiment over priestly aristocracy. When the chief priests were forced to declare themselves explicitly on this point, they were very much embarrassed.

Baptism with John was only a sign calculated to impress the minds of the people and to prepare them for some great movement. There can be no doubt that he was possessed in the highest degree with hope for the coming of the Messiah. "Repent ye," he said, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>1</sup> He announced a great wrath to come, that is to say, terrible catastrophes which were about to occur, and declared that even now the axe was laid upon the root of the tree, and that the tree would soon be cast into the fire. He represented the Messiah with a fan in his hand, gathering the good wheat into his garner and burning the chaff. Repentance, of which baptism was the sign, alms-giving, and moral reformation, were in John's view the great means of preparation for the impending events. We do not know exactly in what light he conceived of these events; but it is certain that he preached with

<sup>1</sup> Matt. iii. 2.

much force against the same adversaries as did Jesus, against rich priests, the Pharisees, the doctors, in one word, against official Judaism; and that, like Jesus, he was especially welcomed by the despised classes. He thought nothing of the title "son of Abraham," and said that God could raise up sons to Abraham from the stones of the highway. It does not appear that he possessed even the germ of the great idea which caused the triumph of Jesus, the conception of a pure religion; but he powerfully served this idea in substituting a private rite for the legal ceremonies in which priests were necessary, as the mediæval Flagellants were the precursors of the Reformation, by depriving the official clergy of the monopoly of the sacraments and of absolution. The general tone of his sermons was severe and stern. The expressions with which he assailed his opponents appear to have been most violent. His preaching was one harsh continuous invective. It is probable that he did not remain a stranger to politics. Josephus, who, through his teacher Banou, was brought into almost direct contact with John, cautiously suggests as much; and the catastrophe which put an end to John's life seems to imply it. His disciples led a very austere life, fasted often and affected a sad demeanour full of disquietude. At times we catch a glimpse of community of possessions, and the theory that the rich man is bound to share all that he has with the poor. Already the poor man appeared as the one who would be specially benefited by the kingdom of God.

Although the centre of the Baptist's action was Judæa, his fame soon penetrated to Galilee and reached Jesus, who, by his first discourses, had already gathered about him a small circle of hearers. As yet possessing little authority, and



doubtless impelled by the desire of seeing a teacher whose teaching had so much in common with his own ideas, Jesus left Galilee and repaired with his little group of disciples to John. The new-comers had themselves baptised like every one else. John welcomed the group of Galilean disciples and had no objection to their remaining distinct from his own. Both teachers were young; they had many ideas in common; they loved one another, and publicly vied with each other in kindly feeling. At the first glance, such a fact surprises us in John the Baptist, and we are tempted to call it in question. Humility has never been a feature of strong Jewish souls. It would seem as though a man of such stubborn character, a kind of perpetually irritated Lamennais, would be very passionate, and suffer neither rivalry nor half-adhesion. But this manner of viewing things rests upon a false conception of the personality of John. We imagine him as a man of ripened years; he was, on the contrary, of the same age as Jesus, and very young according to the ideas of the time. In mental development he was the brother and not the father of Jesus. The two young enthusiasts, full of the same hopes and the same hatreds, were able to make common cause and to lend each other mutual support. Certainly an aged teacher, seeing a man without celebrity approach, and maintain an independent attitude towards him, would have rebelled; there are few examples of a leader of a school receiving his future successor with warmth. But youth is capable of any sacrifice, and it may be admitted that John, having recognised in Jesus a spirit akin to his own, accepted him without any personal reservation. These friendly relations afterwards became the starting-point of a whole system developed by the evangelists, which consisted in

giving the divine mission of Jesus the primary basis of the witness borne by John. Such was the degree of authority won by the Baptist, that it was not deemed possible to find in the world a better guarantee. But far from John abdicating in favour of Jesus, Jesus, during all the time that he spent with him, recognised him as his superior, and only timidly developed his own individual genius.

It seems in fact that, despite his profound originality, Jesus, for some weeks at least, was the imitator of John. His way was still dark before him. At all times moreover Jesus yielded much to opinion, and adopted many things which were not in accord with his own ideas, or for which he cared little, merely because they were popular; but these accessories never injured his leading principle, and were always subordinated to it. Baptism had been brought by John into very great favour; Jesus thought himself obliged to follow his example; therefore he baptised, and his disciples baptised also. No doubt they accompanied the ceremony with preaching similar to that of John. The Jordan was thus covered on all sides with Baptists, whose preaching was more or less successful. The pupil soon equalled the master, and baptism at his hands was much sought after. There was on this point some jealousy among the disciples; the followers of John came to complain to him of the growing success of the young Galilean, whose baptism, they thought, would soon supplant his own. But both teachers remained above such pettiness. According to one tradition, it was while in John's company that Jesus formed the group of his most noted disciples. The superiority of John was too indisputable for Jesus, who was as yet little known, to think of contesting it. Jesus only wished to grow up under

John's protection; and he believed himself obliged, in order to gain the multitude's attention, to employ the external means which had given John such astonishing success. When he began to preach again after John's arrest, the first words put into his mouth are but the repetition of one of the Baptist's familiar phrases. Many other of John's expressions may be found repeated word for word in the discourses of Jesus. The two schools appear to have long lived on good terms with each other; and after the death of John, Jesus, as his faithful friend, was one of the first to be informed of the event.

John was soon cut short in his prophetic career. Like the ancient Jewish prophets, he was, in the highest degree, a censor of the established authorities. The extreme daring with which he expressed himself upon their conduct could not fail to involve him in trouble. In Judæa, John does not appear to have been molested by Pilate; but in Perea, beyond the Jordan, he passed into the domain of Antipas. This tyrant was ill at ease at the political leaven which was so little concealed by John in his preaching. There was something suspicious about these great assemblages of men gathered around the Baptist by religious and patriotic enthusiasm. A purely personal grievance was also added to these motives of state, and rendered the austere censor's death inevitable.

One of the most strongly marked characters of this tragical family of the Herods was Herodias, granddaughter of Herod the Great, a violent, ambitious, and passionate woman, who detested Judaism and despised its laws. She had been married, probably against her own inclinations, to her uncle Herod, son of Mariamne, who had been disinherited by Herod the Great, and had

never played any public part. The subordinate position of her husband, as compared with that of other members of the family, gave her no peace; she determined to be sovereign at whatever cost. Antipas was the instrument of whom she made use. This man of weak will having fallen violently in love with her, promised to marry her, and to repudiate his first wife, daughter of Hareth, king of Petra, and emir of the neighbouring tribes of Perea. The Arabian princess, receiving a warning of this project, resolved to fly. Concealing her plan, she pretended that she wished to make a journey to Machero, in her father's territory, and had herself taken thither by the officers of Antipas.

Makaur, or Machero, was a colossal fortress, built by Alexander Jannæus and restored by Herod, in one of the most abrupt *wâdys* to the east of the Dead Sea. It was a wild and desolate country, abounding in strange legends, and believed to be haunted by demons. The fortress was just on the boundary of the countries of Hareth and of Antipas. At that time it was in the possession of Hareth. The latter, having been warned, had had everything prepared for the flight of his daughter, who was conducted from tribe to tribe to Petra.

The almost incestuous union of Antipas and Herodias then took place. The Jewish laws of marriage were a constant stone of offence between the irreligious family of the Herods and the strict Jews. As the members of that numerous and somewhat isolated dynasty were obliged to marry amongst themselves, frequent violations of the limits prescribed by the Law took place. John, in severely attacking Antipas, echoed the general feeling. This was more than enough to make the latter decide to follow up

his suspicions. He caused the Baptist to be arrested, and ordered him to be imprisoned in the fortress of Machero, which he had probably seized after the departure of the daughter of Hareth.

Antipas, who was more timid than cruel, did not desire to put him to death. According to certain accounts, he feared a popular sedition. According to another version, he had taken pleasure in listening to the prisoner, and these interviews had cast him into great perplexities. It is certain that the captivity was prolonged, and that John, from the depths of his prison, still exercised a wide influence. He corresponded with his disciples, and we shall see that he once more had relations with Jesus. His faith that the advent of the Messiah was at hand only grew firmer; he attentively followed the movements outside his prison walls, and sought to discover in them signs that favoured the accomplishment of the hopes on which he had lived.

## CHAPTER VII.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEAS OF JESUS REGARDING  
THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

UP to the arrest of John, which may be approximately dated in the summer of the year 29, Jesus did not leave the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea and the Jordan. A sojourn in the wilderness of Judæa was generally considered as a preparation for great things, as a sort of "retreat" before public action. In this Jesus followed the example of others, and passed forty days with no other companions than wild animals, keeping a rigorous fast. The disciples greatly exercised their imaginative powers concerning this sojourn. In popular belief the desert was reputed to be the abode of demons. There exist in the world few regions more desolate, more God-forsaken, more shut out from life, than the rocky declivity which forms the western shore of the Dead Sea. It was believed that during the time which Jesus spent in this land of terror, he had passed through terrible trials; that Satan had assailed him with illusions, and tempted him with seductive promises; and that afterwards, to reward him for his victory, angels had come to minister to him.

It was probably on emerging from the wilderness that Jesus learnt of the arrest of John the Baptist. He no

longer had any reason to prolong his stay in a country which was half foreign to him. Perhaps also he feared being involved in the severities exercised towards John, and had no wish to expose himself, at a time at which, considering the little celebrity he possessed, his death could in no way serve the progress of his ideas. He returned to Galilee, his true home, ripened by a great experience and having by intercourse with a great man of very different nature acquired full consciousness of his own originality.

On the whole, the influence of John had been more injurious than useful to Jesus. It checked his development; for everything leads us to believe that when he descended towards the Jordan he had higher conceptions than those of John, and that his temporary inclination to baptism was a concession on his part. Perhaps if the Baptist, whose authority it would have been difficult for him to avoid, had remained at liberty, Jesus would not have been able to throw off the yoke of external rites and ceremonies, and, in all probability, would have continued to be an unknown Jewish sectary; for the world would not have abandoned its old ceremonies merely for others of a different kind. It has been by the attractive power of a religion, free from all external forms, that Christianity has won lofty minds. When the Baptist was imprisoned his school soon dwindled away, and Jesus was once more left to take up his own peculiar work. The only things that, in some measure, he owed to John were lessons in preaching and popular action. From that time indeed he preached with much greater power, and made the multitude feel his authority.

It seems too that his sojourn with John had, less by the influence of the Baptist than by the natural progress of his own thought, greatly ripened his ideas on "the kingdom of

heaven." Henceforth his watchword is the "good tidings," the proclamation that the kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus is no longer merely a delightful moralist striving to express sublime lessons in short and vivid aphorisms; he is the transcendent revolutionary who seeks to regenerate the world from its very foundation, and to establish upon earth the ideal which he has conceived. "To await the kingdom of God" is henceforth synonymous with being a disciple of Jesus. This expression, "kingdom of God," or "kingdom of heaven," was, as we have said, already long familiar to the Jews. But Jesus gave it a moral sense, a social application, which even the author of the Book of Daniel, in his apocalyptic enthusiasm, had scarcely dared to perceive in it.

He found that, in the world as it is, evil reigns supreme. Satan is "the prince of this world,"<sup>1</sup> and everything obeys him. The kings slay the prophets. The priests and the doctors do not that which they command others to do; the just are persecuted, and the only portion of the righteous is weeping. The "world" is in a manner the enemy of God and his saints; but God will awaken and will avenge his saints. The day is at hand, for the cup of iniquity is filled. Righteousness will reign in its turn.

A great and sudden revolution is to mark the advent of this reign of righteousness. The world will seem as it were reversed; the actual state being bad, to represent the future one need but conceive nearly the contrary to that which exists. The first shall be last. A new order of things will govern humanity. Now, good and evil are mixed like the tares and the good grain in a field. The master lets them grow up together; but the hour of violent

<sup>1</sup> John xii. 31.



separation will come. The kingdom of God will be as the casting of a great net, which takes both good and bad fish; the good are gathered into vessels, and the rest are thrown away. The germ of this great revolution will not be visible at the first. It will be like a grain of mustard-seed, which is the smallest of seeds, but which, sowed in the earth, becomes a tree under the foliage of which the birds come for rest; or it will be like the leaven which, hidden in the meal, makes the whole ferment. A series of parables, which were often obscure, was intended to express the suddenness of this advent, its apparent injustices, and its inevitable and final character.

Who was to establish this kingdom of God? It should be remembered that the first idea of Jesus, an idea so deeply rooted in him that it had probably no beginning and belonged to the very foundation of his being, was that he was the Son of God, the friend of his Father, the doer of his will. The answer of Jesus to such a question then could not be dubious. The persuasion that he was to make God reign upon earth took absolute possession of his spirit. He looked upon himself as the universal reformer. Heaven, earth, the whole of nature, madness, disease, and death, were but his instruments. In his paroxysm of heroic determination he believed himself omnipotent. If the earth would not submit to this supreme transformation it would be overthrown and purified with fire and the breath of God. A new heaven would be created, and the whole world would be peopled with the angels of God.

A sweeping revolution, even extending to nature itself—such was the fundamental idea of Jesus. It was probably from this time forth that he renounced politics; the example

of Judas the Gaulonite had shown him the uselessness of popular seditions. He never dreamed of rising in revolt against the Romans and tetrarchs. His was not the uncontrolled and anarchical principle of the Gaulonite. His submission to the established powers, though in reality derisive, was in appearance complete. He paid tribute to Cæsar in order to avoid scandal. Freedom and right were not of this world—why should he disturb his life with vain anxieties? Despising the earth, and convinced that the present world was not worth thinking about, he found refuge in his ideal kingdom; he established the great doctrine of transcendent disdain, the true doctrine of the liberty of the soul, which alone can give peace. But as yet he had not said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Much darkness obscured even his clearest visions. At times strange temptations would cross his mind. In the desert of Judæa Satan had offered him the kingdoms of the earth. Lacking in knowledge of the real strength of the Roman Empire as he was, and feeling the enthusiasm which was stirring Judæa to its depths and was soon to culminate in a terrible outbreak of armed resistance, he might well hope to found a kingdom by his numerous following and his own audacity. Many times perhaps the supreme question presented itself to him—will the kingdom of God be achieved by force or by gentleness, by revolt or by patience? One day, it is said, the simple folk of Galilee wished to carry him away and make him king, but Jesus fled into the mountains and remained there for some time in solitude. His noble nature preserved him from the error which would have made him an agitator or a rebel chief, a Theudas or a Barkokeba.

The revolution he wished to bring about was always a

moral revolution ; but he had not yet begun to trust to angels and the last trumpet for its execution. It was upon men and by men themselves that he wished to act. A visionary, who had no other idea than the proximity of the last judgment, would not have had this solicitude for man's amelioration, and would not have founded the finest system of practical moral teaching that humanity has ever received. No doubt his ideas retained much vagueness, and it was rather a noble feeling than a settled design that urged him to the sublime work which was achieved by him, though in a very different manner from that which he imagined.

It was indeed the kingdom of God, or in other words, the kingdom of the soul, which he founded ; and if Jesus, from the bosom of his Father, beholds his work bearing fruit in the history of the world, he may indeed say with truth, "This is what I have desired." That which Jesus established, that which will remain eternally his, allowing for the imperfections inseparable from everything realised by mankind, is the doctrine of the freedom of the soul. Greece had already conceived beautiful ideas on this subject. Some of the Stoics had learnt how to be free even under a tyrant. But in general the ancient world had regarded liberty as being attached to certain political forms ; freedom was personified in Harmodius and Aristogiton, Brutus and Cassius. The true Christian enjoys more real freedom ; here below he is an exile ; what matters it to him who is his transitory governor on this earth, which is not his home ? For him liberty is truth. Jesus was not sufficiently acquainted with history to understand that such a doctrine came most opportunely at the moment when republican liberty was coming to an end, and the small municipal states of antiquity were being absorbed in the

unity of the Roman Empire. But his admirable good sense, and the truly prophetic instinct which he had of his mission, guided him with marvellous certainty. By the saying, "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's,"<sup>1</sup> he created something that stood apart from politics, a refuge for souls in the midst of the empire of brute force. Assuredly such a doctrine had its dangers. To lay down as a principle that legitimate power is to be recognised by the inscription on its coins, to proclaim that the perfect man pays tribute disdainfully and without question, was to destroy republicanism in its ancient form, and to favour all tyranny. Christianity has, in this sense, contributed much to weaken the feeling of civic duty, and to deliver the world to the absolute power of existing circumstances. But by constituting an immense free association, which, for three hundred years, was able to stand apart from politics, Christianity has amply compensated for the wrong it did to civic virtues. The power of the state has been limited to the things of earth; the mind has been freed, at least the terrible rod of Roman omnipotence has been broken for ever.

The man who is, before all else, preoccupied with the duties of public life does not readily forgive those who regard any thing as being higher than his party quarrels. Above all he blames those who subordinate political to social questions, and profess a certain indifference for the former. In one sense he is right, for exclusive power is prejudicial to the proper government of human affairs. But what progress have political "parties" caused in the general morality of our species? If Jesus, instead of founding his heavenly

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiii. 17.

kingdom, had betaken himself to Rome, and expended his energies in plotting against Tiberius or in regretting Germanicus, what would have become of the world? As an austere republican or zealous patriot, he would not have arrested the great current of the events of his age; but in his declaration that politics are of minor importance, he revealed to the world this truth—that one's country is not everything, and that man precedes the citizen in time and is on a higher plane.

The principles of our positive science are offended by the dreams which formed part of the ideal scheme of Jesus. We know the history of the earth; cosmical revolutions of the kind expected by Jesus are only the results of geological or astronomical causes, the connection of which with spiritual things has never yet been demonstrated. But, in order to be just to great masters, they must not be judged by their share of popular prejudices. Columbus discovered America, though he started from very erroneous ideas; Newton believed his foolish explanation of the Apocalypse to be as true as his theory of the world. Shall we place an ordinary man of our own time above a Francis of Assisi, a St. Bernard, a Joan of Arc, or a Luther, because he is free from errors which they professed? Is it desirable that we should measure men by the correctness of their ideas of physics, and by the more or less exact knowledge which they possess of the real constitution of the world? We must better understand the position of Jesus and the principles underlying his power. Eighteenth century deism and a certain kind of Protestantism have accustomed us to think of the founder of the Christian faith only as a great moralist, a benefactor of mankind. We see nothing more in the Gospel than good maxims; we throw a veil of

prudence over the strange intellectual state in which the Gospel came into being. In like manner there are persons who regret that the French Revolution more than once departed from principles, and that it was not brought about by wise and moderate men. Let us not impose our petty and bourgeois programmes on these extraordinary movements that are so far above our ordinary conceptions. Let us continue to admire the "morality of the Gospel"—let us suppress in our religious teachings the chimera which was its very soul; but do not let us believe that the world is to be stirred by simple ideas of happiness or individual morality. The idea of Jesus was much more profound; it was the most revolutionary idea ever existent in a human mind; it should be taken in its totality, and not with those timid suppressions which deprive it of precisely that which has made it of service in the regeneration of mankind.

Essentially the ideal is ever a Utopia. When nowadays we wish to represent the Christ as he appears to the consciousness of our own generation, the consoler and the judge of modern times, what do we do? That which Jesus himself did eighteen hundred and thirty years ago. We suppose the conditions of the real world as being quite other than they are; we represent a moral liberator breaking without weapons the chains of the negro, ameliorating the condition of the poor, delivering the nations from the hands of their oppressor. We forget that this implies the world revolutionised, the climate of Virginia and that of the Congo modified, the blood and the race of millions of men transformed, our social complications restored to a chimerical simplicity, and the political stratifications of Europe displaced from their natural order. The "restoration of all things"<sup>1</sup> desired by

<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 21.

Jesus was not more difficult. The new earth, the new heaven, the new Jerusalem descending from above, the cry: "Behold I make all things new!"<sup>1</sup> are characteristics common to all reformers. The contrast of the ideal with the pitiful reality will always cause human revolts against dispassionate reason such as these, which the man of petty mind regards as madness until the day of their triumph, when those who have opposed them will be the first to recognise their reasonableness.

That there may have been a contradiction between the dogma of an approaching end of the world and the general ethical system of Jesus, conceived in view of a permanent state of mankind, nearly analogous to that which now exists, none will attempt to deny. It was precisely this contradiction that ensured the success of his work. The millenarian alone would have done nothing that was lasting, the moralist alone nothing that was powerful. The millenarianism gave the impulse, the ethics insured the future. In this way Christianity united the two conditions of great success in this world—a revolutionary starting-point, and the possibility of continued existence. Everything that is to succeed must respond to these two wants; for the world seeks at once to change and to endure. Jesus, at the same time that he announced an unparalleled revolution in human affairs, proclaimed the principles upon which society has rested for eighteen hundred years.

That indeed which distinguishes Jesus from the agitators of his own time, and from those of all ages, is his perfect idealism. Jesus was, in some respects, an anarchist, for he had no idea of civil government. That government seemed to him purely and simply an abuse. He spoke of it in

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxi. 5.

vague terms, and as a man of the people with no idea of politics. Every magistrate appeared to him a natural enemy of the people of God; he predicted that his disciples would be in conflict with the civil powers, without thinking for a moment that there was anything of which to be ashamed in this. But he never showed any desire to put himself in the place of the rich and the mighty. He desired to annihilate riches and power, but not to seize them for himself. He predicted that his disciples would suffer persecution and all manner of punishments; but never once did the thought of armed resistance manifest itself. The idea of being all-powerful by suffering and resignation, and of triumphing over force by purity of heart, is indeed an idea peculiar to Jesus. Jesus was not a dualist, for to him everything tended to a concrete realisation; he had not the least notion of a soul separated from the body. But he was a perfect idealist, matter being to him only the outward manifestation of the idea, and the real, the living expression of that which is invisible.

To whom should we turn, in whom should we trust to establish the kingdom of God? There was no doubt in the mind of Jesus on this point. That which is held in honour amongst men is abomination in the sight of God. The founders of the kingdom of God are the simple. Not the rich, not the learned, not priests; but women, common folk, the humble, and the young. The great sign of the Messiah's coming is that "the poor have the good tidings preached to them."<sup>1</sup> It was the idyllic and gentle nature of Jesus that here resumed the upper hand. A great social revolution, in which distinctions of rank would be dissolved, in which all authority in this world would be humili-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 5.



ated, was his dream. The world was not to believe him ; the world was to put him to death at last. But his disciples were not to be of this world. They were to be a little flock of humble and simple folk, who would conquer by their very humility. The idea which has made "worldly" the anti-thesis of "Christian" was fully justified in the thoughts of the Master.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## JESUS AT CAPERNAUM.

WE shall find that Jesus, possessed by an idea that gradually grows more and more imperiously exclusive, will proceed henceforth with a kind of fatal impassibility along the path marked out by his astonishing genius and the extraordinary circumstances in which he lived. Hitherto he had only confided his thoughts to a few persons secretly attracted to him; henceforward his teaching was given in public and drew popular attention. He was about thirty years of age. The little group of hearers which had accompanied him to John the Baptist had increased no doubt, and perhaps some of John's disciples had attached themselves to him. It was with this first nucleus of a Church that he boldly announced, on his return to Galilee, the "good tidings of the kingdom of God." This kingdom was at hand, and it was he, Jesus, who was that "Son of Man" whom Daniel in his vision had beheld as the divine herald of the last and supreme revelation.

It must be remembered that in Jewish ideas, which were opposed to art and mythology, the simple form of man had a superiority over those of the *Cherubim* and fantastic animals which the imagination of the people, since it had been under Assyrian influence, had ranged around the

Divine Majesty. Already, in Ezekiel, the Being seated on the supreme throne, far above the monsters of the mysterious chariot, the great revealer of prophetic visions, has the figure of a man. In the book of Daniel, in the midst of the vision of the empires, represented by animals, at the moment when the great judgment begins and the books are being opened, a Being "like unto a Son of man" advances towards the Ancient of Days, who bestows on him power to judge the world and govern it for eternity. "Son of man," in the Semitic languages, especially in the Aramean dialects, is a simple synonym of "man." But this important passage in Daniel impressed men's minds; the words, "Son of man," became, at least in certain schools of thought, one of the titles of the Messiah, regarded as judge of the world, and king of the new era about to be inaugurated. The application which Jesus made of it to himself was therefore the proclamation of his Messiahship, and the affirmation of the coming catastrophe in which he was to act as judge, clad with the full powers delegated to him by the Ancient of Days.

The success of the new prophet's teaching was now decisive. A group of men and women, all characterised by the same spirit of childish frankness and simple innocence, adhered to him, and said, "Thou art the Messiah." As the Messiah was to be the son of David, they naturally endowed him with this title, which was synonymous with the former. Jesus willingly allowed it to be given to him, although it might cause him some embarrassment, his birth being well known. The name which he himself preferred was that of "Son of man," an apparently humble title, but one directly connected with Messianic hopes. It was by this title that he designated himself, to such an extent

indeed that on his lips "Son of man" was synonymous with the pronoun I, the use of which he avoided. But he was never thus addressed, doubtless because the name in question was destined to be fully applicable to him only on the day of his future appearance.

The centre of his operations at this epoch of his life was the little town of Capernaum, situated on the shore of the Lake of Genesareth. The name of Capernaum, of which the word *capnar*, "village," forms a part, seems to designate a small old-fashioned town, as opposed to the large towns built on the Roman system, like Tiberias. Its name was so little known, that Josephus, in one passage in his writings, takes it for the name of a fountain, the fountain being of greater celebrity than the village standing near it. Like Nazareth, Capernaum had no history, and had in no way participated in the profane movement favoured by the Herods. Jesus was much attached to the town and made it a second home. Soon after his return he had attempted to begin his work at Nazareth, but without success. He could not perform any miracle there, as one of his biographers naïvely remarks. The fact that his family, which was of humble rank, was known in the district lessened his authority too much. People could not regard as the son of David one whose brother, sister, and brother-in-law they saw every day; and it is moreover remarkable that his family were strongly opposed to him, and flatly declined to believe in his mission. On one occasion his mother and his brothers maintained that he was out of his mind, and sought to arrest him by force. The Nazarenes, who were still more violent, wished, it is said, to kill him by throwing him from a steep cliff. Jesus aptly remarked that this treatment was the common fate of all great men, and applied to

himself the proverb, "No man is a prophet in his own country."

This check far from discouraged him. He returned to Capernaum, where he was much more favourably received, and from there he organised a series of missions among the little towns in the neighbourhood. The people of this beautiful and fertile country scarcely ever assembled together except on the Sabbath. This was the day which he chose for his teaching. At that time each town had its synagogue, or place of meeting. This was a rather small rectangular room, with a portico, decorated in the Greek style. The Jews, having no distinctive architecture of their own, never troubled to give these edifices an original style. The remains of many ancient synagogues still exist in Galilee. They are all constructed of large and good materials; but their style is somewhat tawdry, in consequence of the profusion of floral ornaments, foliage, and twisted decorative work which characterises Jewish buildings. In the interior there were seats, a pulpit for public reading, and a closet to contain the sacred rolls. These edifices, which had none of the characteristics of a temple, were the centres of the whole of Jewish life. There the people gathered together on the Sabbath for prayer, and the reading of the Law and the Prophets. As Judaism, except in Jerusalem, had, properly speaking, no clergy, the first comer stood up and read the lessons of the day (*parasha* and *haphtara*), adding thereto a *midrash*, or entirely personal commentary, in which he unfolded his own ideas. This was the origin of the "homily," the finished model of which we find in the short treatises of Philo. Those present had the right of raising objections and putting questions to the reader; so that the meeting soon degene-

rated into a kind of free assembly. It had a president, "elders," a *hazzan*—that is a recognised reader or apparitor—"delegates," who were secretaries or messengers, to conduct the correspondence between one synagogue and another, and a *shammash* or sacristan. Thus the synagogues were really little independent republics, which had an extensive jurisdiction, undertook the responsibility of enfranchisement, and supervised those enfranchised. Like all municipal corporations, up to an advanced period of the Roman Empire, they issued honorary decrees, voted resolutions, which had legal force for the community, and ordained corporal punishments, which were generally carried out by the *hazzan*.

With the extreme activity of mind which has always characterised the Jews, such an institution, despite the arbitrary rigours it tolerated, could not fail to give rise to very lively discussions. Thanks to the synagogues, Judaism has been able to maintain its integrity through eighteen centuries of persecution. They were like so many little worlds apart, which preserved the national spirit and offered a field for intestine struggles. A large amount of passion was expended in them; quarrels for precedence were hotly contested. To have a seat of honour in the front row was the reward of great piety, or the most envied privilege of wealth. On the other hand, the liberty, accorded to every one who cared to have it, of instituting himself reader and commentator of the sacred text, afforded marvellous facilities for the propagation of new ideas. This was one of the great instruments of power wielded by Jesus, and his most customary method of propounding his doctrinal instruction. He entered the synagogue and stood up to read; the *hazzan* offered him the book, he unrolled it,

and reading the *parasha*, or *haphtara* of the day, he drew from this reading some development in harmony with his own ideas. As there were few Pharisees in Galilee, the discussion did not assume that degree of intensity and tone of acrimony against him which at Jerusalem would have arrested his progress at the outset. These good Galileans had never heard preaching so well adapted to their cheerful imaginations. They admired him, they encouraged him, they found that he spoke well and that his reasons were convincing. He confidently answered the most difficult objections; the almost poetical harmony of his discourses won the affections of those people, whose simple minds had not yet been withered by the pedantry of the doctors.

The authority of the young master thus continued to increase day by day, and naturally the more that people believed in him, the more he believed in himself. His sphere of action was very narrow. It was wholly confined to the valley of the Lake of Tiberias; and even in this valley there was one region which he preferred. The Lake is fifteen or sixteen miles long and nine or ten broad. Although it presents the appearance of an almost perfect oval, it forms a kind of gulf commencing from Tiberias up to the entrance of the Jordan, the curve of which measures about nine miles. Such was the field in which the seed sown by Jesus at last found a well-prepared soil. Let us go over it step by step, and try to imagine how it looked before it was covered with the mantle of aridity and mourning cast upon it by the evil spirit of Islamism.

On leaving Tiberias, we at first find steep cliffs forming a mountain which seems to plunge into the sea. Then the mountains gradually recede; a plain (El Ghoueir) opens almost on a level with the Lake. It is a delightful wood of

rich verdure, furrowed by numerous streams which partly flow from a great round basin of ancient construction (Ain-Medawara). On the border of this plain, which is, properly speaking, the country of Genesareth, is the miserable village of Medjdel. At the other end of the plain, still following the coast-line, we come upon the site of a town (Khan-Minyeh), with very beautiful streams (Ain-et-Tin), and a pretty road, narrow and deep, cut out of the rock, which Jesus must often have trod, serving as a passage between the plain of Genesareth and the northern slopes of the lake. A quarter of an hour's journey from here we cross a stream of salt water (Ain-Tabiga) issuing from the earth by several large springs at a little distance from the lake, and flowing into it in the midst of a dense mass of verdure. At last, after forty minutes' further walking, we find upon the arid declivity which extends from Ain-Tabiga to the mouth of the Jordan, a few huts and a collection of monumental ruins, called Tell-Houm.

Five little towns, the names of which mankind will remember as long as those of Rome and Athens, were standing in the time of Jesus, in the district which extends from the village of Medjdel to Tell-Houm. Of these five towns, Magdala, Dalmanutha, Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin, the first alone can be identified at the present time with any certainty. The repulsive village of Medjdel has no doubt kept the name and site of the little town which gave to Jesus his most faithful woman friend. The site of Dalmanutha is quite unknown. It is possible that Chorazin was a little further inland, to the north of the Lake. As to Bethsaida and Capernaum, it is in truth almost at hazard that they have been placed at Tell-Houm, Ain-et-Tin, Khan-Minyeh, or Ain-Medawara. We might imagine



that in topography, as well as in history, there has been some profound design purposely concealing the traces of the great founder. It is doubtful whether we shall ever succeed throughout this district of utter devastation in ascertaining the places to which mankind would gladly come to kiss the imprint of his feet.

The Lake, the horizon, the shrubs, the flowers, are all that remain of the little district, three or four leagues in extent, where Jesus initiated his divine work. The trees have totally disappeared. In this country, in which vegetation was formerly so luxuriant that Josephus saw in it a kind of miracle—nature, according to him, being pleased to bring hither, side by side, the plants of cold countries, the growths of the torrid zone, and the trees of temperate climates, laden all the year with flowers and fruits—in this country travellers are now obliged to calculate a day beforehand the spot where they are next to find a shady resting-place. The lake has become deserted. A single craft in the most miserable condition now crosses the waves that were once so rich in life and joy. But the waters are still clear and transparent. The shore, composed of rocks and pebbles, is that of a little sea, not that of a pond, like the shores of Lake Huleh. It is clean, dainty, free from mud, and always beaten in the same place by the light movement of the waves. Small promontories, covered with rose-laurels, tamarisks, and thorny caper bushes, are to be seen; in two places especially, at the mouth of the Jordan, near Tarichea, and on the border of the plain of Genesareth, there are beautiful gardens where the waves ebb and flow through masses of turf and flowers. The rivulet of Ain-Tabiga makes a little estuary, full of pretty shells. Bevvies of aquatic birds cover the lake. The horizon dazzles one

with its intense light. The waters, of an empyrean blue, deeply imbedded amid burning rocks, seem, when viewed from the height of the mountains of Safed, to lie at the bottom of a golden cup. On the north, the snowy ravines of Hermon stretch in white lines along the sky; on the west, the high undulating plateaus of Gaulonitis and Perea, absolutely barren and clad by the sun with a kind of soft haze, form one compact mountain, or rather a long and very lofty ridge, which from Cæsarea Philippi runs indefinitely towards the south.

The heat on the shore is now very oppressive. The lake lies in a hollow six hundred and fifty feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and thus shares the torrid conditions of the Dead Sea. An abundant vegetation formerly tempered this excessive heat; it would be difficult to understand how a furnace, such as the whole lake valley is at the present day, from the beginning of the month of May, can have ever been the scene of great activity. Josephus however considered the country very temperate. There can be no doubt that here, as in the Campagna of Rome, there has been a change of climate brought about by historical causes. It is Islamism, and especially the Mussulman reaction against the Crusades, which has withered as with a blast of death the land beloved by Jesus. The people of this beautiful country of Genesareth never suspected that behind the brow of this peaceful wayfarer its highest destinies were being determined. Jesus was a dangerous fellow-countryman; for he was fatal to the land which had the portentous glory of bearing him. Having become the object of universal love or hate, coveted by two rival fanaticisms, Galilee, as the price of its fame, has been transformed into a desert. But who would say that Jesus

would have been happier had he lived a life of obscurity in his village to the full age of man? And who would bestow a thought on these ungrateful Nazarenes, had not one of them, at the risk of compromising the future of their town, recognised his Father and proclaimed himself the Son of God?

Four of five large villages, lying at half-an-hour's journey from one another, formed the little world of Jesus at the time of which we speak. He does not appear to have ever visited Tiberias, a city inhabited for the most part by Pagans, and the usual residence of Antipas. Sometimes, however, he wandered beyond his favourite region. He went by boat to the eastern shore, to Gergesa for instance. Towards the north we see him at Paneas or Cæsarea Philippi, at the foot of Mount Hermon. And lastly, he journeyed once in the direction of Tyre and Sidon, a country which must have been marvellously prosperous at that time. In all these districts he was in the midst of paganism. At Cæsarea he saw the celebrated grotto of Panium, thought to be the source of the Jordan, and associated in popular belief with weird legends; he could admire the marble temple which Herod had erected near there in honour of Augustus; he probably paused before the numerous votive statues to Pan, to the Nymphs, to the Echo of the Grotto, which piety had already begun to accumulate in this beautiful place. A rationalistic Jew, accustomed to take strange gods for deified men or for demons, must have considered all these figurative representations as idols. The charm of nature worship, which seduced more sensitive nations, never affected him. He was doubtless ignorant of what traces of a primitive worship, more or less analogous to that of the Jews, the ancient

sanctuary of Melkarth, at Tyre, might still contain. The paganism which, in Phœnicia, had raised on every hill a temple and a sacred grove, and the general aspect of great industry and profane wealth, must have had little charm in his eyes. Monotheism deprives men of all appreciation of the pagan religions; the Mussulman, who visits polytheistic countries, seems to have no eyes. Jesus assuredly learnt nothing in these journeys. He returned always to his well-beloved shore of Genesareth. The mother-land of his thoughts was there; there he found faith and love.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS

IN this earthly paradise, which the great revolutions of history had, up to that period, scarcely touched, lived a population in perfect harmony with the land itself, active, honest, joyous, and tender of heart. As regards fish, the Lake of Tiberias is one of the richest lakes in the world; very productive fisheries had been established, especially at Bethsaida and Capernaum, and had produced a certain degree of wealth. The fishermen and their families formed a population of gentle and peaceable folk, extending by numerous ties of relationship through the whole lake district which we have described. Their comparatively easy life left entire freedom to their imagination. Ideas about the kingdom of God found in these small communities of worthy people more credence than anywhere else. Nothing of what is called civilisation, in the Greek and worldly sense, had reached them. Neither was there any of our Teutonic and Celtic earnestness; but, although goodness amongst them was often superficial and without depth, they were quiet in their habits and had a certain intelligence and shrewdness. We may imagine them as somewhat similar to the better parts of the population of the Lebanon, but with the gift, which the latter do not possess, of producing great

men. Here Jesus found his true family. He settled in their midst as one of them; Capernaum became "his own city"; in the centre of the little circle which adored him, his sceptical brothers and ungrateful Nazareth, with its mocking incredulity, were forgotten.

One house above all at Capernaum offered him a pleasant refuge and devoted disciples. It was that of two brothers, both sons of a certain Jonas, who probably was dead at the time when Jesus came to live on the shores of the lake. These two brothers were Simon, surnamed *Cephas*, in Greek *Petros*, "stone," and Andrew. Born at Bethsaida, they were settled at Capernaum when Jesus began his public life. Peter was married and had children; his mother-in-law lived with him. Jesus loved his house and dwelt in it habitually. Andrew appears to have been a disciple of John the Baptist, and Jesus may possibly have known him on the banks of the Jordan. The two brothers always continued, even during the period in which apparently they must have been most occupied with their Master, to follow their employment as fishermen. Jesus, who was fond of playing upon words, said at times that he would make them fishers of men. Amongst all his disciples indeed he had none more devotedly attached to him.

Another family, that of Zabdia or Zebedee, a well-to-do fisherman and owner of several boats, gave Jesus a warm welcome. Zebedee had two sons: the elder was James, the younger, John, who later was destined to play a very prominent part in the history of infant Christianity. Both were zealous disciples. From certain indications, it would seem that John, like Andrew, had known Jesus when in company with John the Baptist. In any case the two families of Jonas and Zebedee appear to have been closely united.

Salome, wife of Zebedee, was also greatly attached to Jesus, and accompanied him until his death.

Women, in fact, received him eagerly. He manifested towards them the reserved manners which make a very sweet union of ideas possible between the two sexes. The separation of men from women, which has precluded all progress in refinement among the Semitic peoples, was no doubt then, as in our own days, much less rigorous in the rural districts and villages than in the large towns. Three or four devoted Galilean women always accompanied the young Master, and disputed among themselves the pleasure of listening to him and tending him in turn. They brought into the new sect an element of enthusiasm and taste for the marvellous, the importance of which had already begun to be understood. One of them, Mary of Magdala, who has given such a world-wide celebrity to that poor town, appears to have been of a very ardent temperament. According to the language of the time, she had been possessed by seven demons—that is, she had suffered from nervous and apparently inexplicable maladies. Jesus, by his pure and sweet beauty, calmed her troubled nature. The Magdalene was faithful to him, even unto Golgotha, and on the day but one after his death played a leading part; for, as we shall see later, she was the principal agent by which faith in the resurrection was established. Joanna, wife of Chuza one of the stewards of Antipas, Susanna, and others who have remained unknown, followed him constantly and ministered to his wants. Some were rich, and by their wealth enabled the young prophet to live without following the trade which, until then, he had practised.

Many others made a practice of following him about, and acknowledged him as their Master;—a certain Philip of

Bethsaida ; Nathanael, son of Tolmaï or Ptolemy, of Cana, a disciple of the first period ; and Matthew, probably to be identified with the Matthew who was the Xenophon of infant Christianity. He had been a publican, and as such doubtless handled the *Kalam* more easily than the others. Perhaps it was this that suggested to him the idea of writing the *Logia*, which form the basis of what we know of the teachings of Jesus. Among the disciples are also mentioned Thomas or Didymus, who was sometimes sceptical, but apparently a man of warm heart and of generous impulses ; one Lebbæus or Thaddeus ; Simon Zelotes, who was perhaps a disciple of Judas the Gaulonite, and belonged to the party of the *Kenaim*, which was formed about that time and was soon to play so great a part in the movements of the Jewish people ; Joseph Barsabas, surnamed "the Just" ; Matthias ; a problematical person called Aristion ; and lastly, Judas, son of Simon, of the town of Kerioth, who was the exception in the faithful flock, and drew upon himself so terrible a notoriety. He was the only one who was not a Galilean. Kerioth was a town at the extreme south of the tribe of Judah, a day's journey beyond Hebron.

We have seen that on the whole the family of Jesus had little affection for him. James and Jude, however, his cousins by Mary Cleophas, became his disciples henceforth, and Mary Cleophas herself was one of those friends who followed him to Calvary. At this period we do not see his mother beside him. It was only after the death of Jesus that Mary acquired great importance, and that the disciples sought to attach her to them. It was then, too, that the members of the founder's family, under the name of "brothers of the Lord," formed an influential group, which for a long time headed the Church of Jerusalem, and, after



the sack of the city, took refuge in Batanea. The simple fact of having been familiar with him became a marked advantage, in the same manner as, after the death of Mahomet, the wives and daughters of the prophet, who had had no importance in his lifetime, became great authorities.

In this friendly group Jesus evidently had his favourites, and, so to speak, an inner circle. The two sons of Zebedee, James and John, seem to have been in the front rank. They were full of fire and passion. Jesus had aptly surnamed them "sons of thunder," on account of their excessive zeal, which, had it controlled the thunder, would have made use of it too often. John especially appears to have been on familiar terms with Jesus. It may be that the disciples who gradually grouped themselves around the second son of Zebedee, and apparently wrote his memoirs in a manner that scarcely dissimulates the interests of the school, have exaggerated the warm affection which Jesus bore him. The most significant fact however is that, in the synoptic Gospels, Simon Bar-Jonah or Peter, James son of Zebedee, and John his brother, form a sort of privy council, which Jesus summons at certain times, when he suspects the faith and intelligence of the others. It seems, moreover, that they were all three associated in their trade as fishermen. The affection of Jesus for Peter was very deep. The character of the latter—straightforward, sincere, impulsive—pleased Jesus, who at times permitted himself to smile at his headstrong manner. Peter, who was little of a mystic, told the master his simple doubts, his prejudices, and his entirely human weaknesses, with an honest frankness which recalls that of Joinville towards St. Louis. Jesus reproved him in a friendly way that showed his confidence and

esteem. As to John, his youth, his enthusiasm, and his vivid imagination, must have had great charm. The personality of this extraordinary man, who exerted so strong an influence on infant Christianity, only developed itself later. If he were not the author of the strange Gospel which bears his name, and, despite its erroneous ideas on many points in the character of Jesus, contains such priceless information, it is at least possible that he may have influenced its production. He was the biographer of Jesus, as Plato was of Socrates. Accustomed to shuffle his recollections with the fevered disquietude of an ecstatic soul, he transformed his Master while he believed he was describing him, thus furnishing clever forgers with the pretext of an alleged document, in the composition of which perfect good faith has apparently not been shown.

No hierarchy, properly speaking, existed in the new sect. They had all to call each other "brothers"; and Jesus absolutely forbade titles of superior rank, such as *rabbi*, master, father—he alone being Master, and God alone being Father. The greatest among them ought to be the servant of the others. Simon Bar-Jonah, however, was distinguished amongst his fellows by a peculiar degree of importance. Jesus lived in his house and taught in his boat; his home was the centre of Gospel preaching. By outsiders he was regarded as the chief of the flock; and it was to him that the overseers of the tolls applied for the taxes which were due from the community. He had been the first to recognise Jesus as the Messiah. In a moment of unpopularity, Jesus asking of his disciples, "Would ye also go away?" Simon answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."<sup>1</sup> Jesus at various

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 67, 68.

times granted him a certain priority in his Church, and gave him the Syrian surname of *Kepha* (stone), by which he wished to signify that he made him the corner-stone of the edifice. At one time he seems even to promise him "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," and to grant him the right of pronouncing upon earth decisions which should always be ratified in eternity.

There can be no doubt that this priority of Peter excited a little jealousy. Jealousy was especially kindled in view of the future, and of that kingdom of God in which all the disciples would be seated upon thrones, on the right and left of the Master, to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. They asked themselves who would then be nearest to the Son of man, and act, so to speak, as his prime minister and assessor. The two sons of Zebedee aspired to this rank. Brooding over thoughts of this kind, they prompted their mother Salome, who one day took Jesus aside and asked him for the two places of honour for her sons. Jesus evaded the request by his habitual maxim that he who exalted himself should be humbled, and that the kingdom of heaven would be possessed by the lowly. This occasioned some talk in the community; and there was great murmuring against James and John. The same rivalry seems to show itself in the Gospel of John, where the supposed narrator unceasingly declares himself to have been "the disciple whom Jesus loved," to whom the Master in dying confided his mother, and where he seeks to place himself near Simon Peter—at times to put himself before him on important occasions, in narrating which the older evangelists had omitted to mention his name.

Among the preceding persons, all those of whom we know anything had begun by being fishermen. In a country

of simple habits where every one worked, this employment was not of so extremely humble a nature as the rhetoric of preachers would make it, the better to display the miraculous origin of Christianity. But at all events, none of the disciples belonged to a high social class. Only a certain Levi, son of Alpheus, and perhaps the apostle Matthew, had been publicans. But those to whom this name was given in Judæa were not the farmers-general of taxes, men of high rank (always Roman patricians) who were called at Rome *publicani*. They were the agents of these farmers-general, employés of low rank, simply officers of the customs. The great route from Acre to Damascus, one of the most ancient trade routes of the world, which crossed Galilee, skirting the lake, made employés of this kind very numerous there. At Capernaum, which was perhaps on the highroad, there was a numerous staff. This profession is never popular, but among the Jews it was considered quite criminal. Taxation, being new to them, was the sign of their subjection; one party, that of Judas the Gaulonite, maintained that to pay it was an act of paganism. So too the customs officers were abhorred by the zealots of the Law. They were only classed with assassins, highway robbers, and men of infamous life. Jews who accepted such offices were excommunicated, and deprived of the right to make a will; their property was accursed, and the casuists forbade the changing of money with them. These poor men, outcasts of society, had no social intercourse outside their own class. Jesus accepted a dinner offered him by Levi, at which there were, according to the language of the time, "many publicans and sinners." This caused grave scandal. In these houses of ill-repute there was a risk of meeting bad society. We shall often see him thus,

caring little if he shocked the prejudices of respectable people, seeking to raise the classes humiliated by the orthodox, and thus exposing himself to the most scathing reproaches of the devotees. The Pharisees had made endless observances and a species of external "respectability" the price of salvation. The true moralist who came proclaiming that God cares for one thing alone—righteousness in feeling, must of necessity have been welcomed with blessings by all souls that had escaped the corruption of official hypocrisy.

Jesus owed these numerous conquests to the infinite charm of his personality and speech. A searching phrase, a glance cast upon a simple conscience which only needed awakening, gave him an ardent disciple. Sometimes Jesus employed an innocent artifice which was also used by Joan of Arc: he affected to know something of the inner life of him whom he wished to gain, or else he would remind him of some circumstance dear to his heart. It was thus that he is said to have attracted Nathanael, Peter, and the woman of Samaria. Concealing the true source of his power—his superiority over all those who surrounded him—he permitted people to believe (in order to satisfy the ideas of the time, ideas in which moreover he himself fully shared) that a revelation from on high revealed all secrets to him and laid open all hearts. Every one thought that Jesus lived in a sphere higher than that of humanity. It was said that he conversed on the mountains with Moses and Elias; it was believed that in his moments of solitude the angels came to give him homage, and establish a supernatural intercourse between him and heaven.

## CHAPTER X.

## PREACHING BY THE LAKE.

SUCH was the group which gathered around Jesus on the shores of the lake of Tiberias. In it the aristocracy was represented by a customs-officer and by the wife of one of Herod's stewards. The rest were fishermen and common folk. Their ignorance was extreme, their intelligence feeble; they believed in apparitions and spirits. Not one element of Greek culture had reached this first assembly of the saints, and they were but little instructed in Jewish learning; but warmth of heart and good-will overflowed. The beautiful climate of Galilee made the life of these honest fishermen a constant delight. Simple, good, and happy as they were, they truly precluded the kingdom of God—rocked gently on their delightful little sea, or at night sleeping on its shores. We do not realise for ourselves the charm of a life which thus glides away under the open sky—the sweet and strong love given by this perpetual contact with nature, and the dreams of nights passed thus in the clear starlight under an azure dome of limitless expanse. It was on such a night that Jacob, with his head resting upon a stone, saw in the stars the promise of an innumerable posterity, and the mysterious ladder by which the Elohim came and went from heaven to earth. At the

time of Jesus the heavens were not shut nor was the earth grown cold. The clouds still opened over the Son of man; the angels ascended and descended above his head; vision of the kingdom of God was vouchsafed everywhere, for man carried it in his heart. These simple souls contemplated with clear and gentle gaze the universe in its ideal source. It may be that the world unveiled its secret to the divinely lucid conscience of these happy children, who by their purity of heart deserved one day to stand in God's presence.

Jesus lived with his disciples almost always in the open air. Sometimes he got into a boat, and from it taught his hearers, who were crowded upon the shore. Sometimes he sat upon the mountains which border on the lake, where the air is pure and the horizon luminous. Thus the faithful band led a joyous wandering life, gathering the inspirations of the Master in their first bloom. Sometimes an innocent doubt was raised, a mildly sceptical question put; but Jesus, with a smile or a look, silenced the objection. At every step—in the passing cloud, the germinating seed, the ripening corn—they saw a sign of the kingdom drawing nigh, they believed themselves on the eve of seeing God, of being masters of the world; tears were turned into joy; it was the advent upon earth of universal consolation.

“Blessed,” said the master, “are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

His preaching was soft and gentle, inspired with a feeling for nature and the perfume of the fields. He loved flowers, and based on them his most charming lessons. The birds of the air, the sea, the mountains, and the games of children were in turn touched on in his teaching. There was no trace of Greek influence in his style ; it approached much more nearly to that of the Hebrew parabolists, and especially of the aphorisms of the Jewish doctors, his contemporaries, such as we read in the *Pirké Aboth*. His teachings were not developed very far, and formed a species of propositions in the style of the Koran, which, pieced together, afterwards went to form the long discourses written by Matthew. No transition united these diverse fragments ; generally however the same inspiration breathed through them and gave them their unity. It was above all in parable that the Master excelled. There was nothing in Judaism to give him a model for this delightful feature. He created it. It is true that in the Buddhist books we find parables of exactly the same tone and construction as the Gospel parables ; but it is difficult to admit that a Buddhist influence has been exercised in the latter. The spirit of mildness and depth of feeling which animated nascent Christianity and Buddhism alike, perhaps suffice to explain these similarities.

A total indifference to external life and the vain superfluous luxuries in furniture and dress, which our drearier

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 3-10.



countries make necessary to us, was the consequence of the sweet and simple life lived in Galilee. Cold climates, by compelling man to a perpetual conflict with external nature, cause him to attach much importance to the quest of comfort. On the other hand, lands that awaken few desires are lands of idealism and of poesy. In such countries the accessories of life are insignificant compared with the pleasure of being alive. The embellishment of the house is superfluous, for it is inhabited as little as possible. The abundant and regular food of less generous climates would be considered heavy and disagreeable. And as to luxury in dress, what can rival that which God has given to the earth and the birds of the air? Labour in climates of this kind seems useless; its return is not worth the expenditure of energy it requires. The beasts of the field are better clad than the richest of men, and they do nothing. This disdain which, when it has not idleness as its motive, greatly tends to loftiness of soul, inspired Jesus with some charming apologues:—"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," said he, "where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also. . . . No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment? Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they

reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto his stature? And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."<sup>1</sup>

This essentially Galilean feeling had an important influence on the destiny of the infant sect. The happy flock, trusting to the heavenly Father for the satisfaction of its needs as its first principle, looked upon the cares of life as an evil which stifles in man the germ of all good. Each day they asked of God the bread for the morrow. Why lay up treasure? The kingdom of God was at hand. "Sell that ye have and give alms," said the Master. "Make for yourselves purses which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not."<sup>2</sup> What more foolish than to heap up treasures for heirs whom thou wilt never behold? As an example of human folly, Jesus loved to quote the case of a man who, after having enlarged his barns and amassed wealth for long

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 19-21, 24-34.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xii. 33, 34.

years, died before having enjoyed it. The brigandage, which was deeply rooted in Galilee, gave much force to views of this kind. The poor man who did not suffer from his poverty should regard himself as favoured by God; whilst the rich man, having a less sure possession, was the true pauper. In our societies, founded on a very rigorous conception of private property, the position of the poor is horrible; they have literally no place under the sun. There are no flowers, no grass, no shade, except for him who possesses the earth. In the East, these are gifts of God which belong to no man. The proprietor has but a slender privilege; nature is the inheritance of all.

In this, moreover, infant Christianity only followed in the footsteps of the Jewish sects which practised a monastic life. A communistic element entered into these sects, Essenes and Therapeutæ, which were held in equal disfavour by Pharisees and Sadducees. The Messianic doctrine, an entirely political question among the orthodox Jews, was with them an entirely social question. By means of a gentle, disciplined, contemplative existence, the liberty of the individual had full scope, and these little churches in which, not without reason perhaps, some imitation of neo-Pythagorean institutions has been suspected, believed they were inaugurating the heavenly kingdom upon earth. The thought of Utopias of blessed life, founded on the brotherhood of men and pure worship of the true God, haunted lofty souls, and on all sides produced bold and sincere but short-lived attempts at realisation.

Jesus, whose relations with the Essenes are difficult to determine exactly (resemblances in history not always implying relations), was certainly on this point their brother. Community of goods was for some time the rule in the new

society. Covetousness was the cardinal sin; but care must be taken to note that the sin of covetousness, against which Christian morality has been so severe, was then simple attachment to private property. The first condition of becoming a disciple of Jesus was to sell one's goods and to give the proceeds to the poor. Those who drew back from this extreme measure were not permitted to enter the community. Jesus often repeated that he who has found the kingdom of God ought to buy it at the price of all his possessions, and that, in so doing, he still makes an advantageous bargain. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls; and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."<sup>1</sup> Alas! the practical drawbacks of the theory were not long in making themselves felt. A treasurer was required, and Judas of Kerioth was chosen for that office. Rightly or wrongly, he was accused of stealing from the common purse; a heavy burden of hatred accumulated on his head.

Sometimes the Master, more versed in things of heaven than those of earth, taught a still more singular political economy. In a strange parable, a steward is praised for having made himself friends among the poor at the expense of his master, in order that the poor in their turn might secure his entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The poor in fact, necessarily being the almoners of this kingdom, will only receive those who have given alms to them. A prudent man, who takes thought of the future, ought therefore to seek

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiii. 44, 46.

to gain their favour. "And the Pharisees," says the Evangelist, "who were lovers of money, heard all these things: and they scoffed at him."<sup>1</sup> Did they also hear the formidable parable which follows? "Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day: and a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; yea, even the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and that he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom: and the rich man also died, and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things: but now here he is comforted and thou art in anguish."<sup>2</sup> What could be more just! Later, this parable was called that of the "wicked rich man." But it is purely and simply the parable of the "rich man." He is in hell because he is rich, because he does not give his wealth to the poor, because he dines well, while other men at his door dine badly. Latterly, taking a less exaggerated view for the moment, Jesus does not make it obligatory to sell one's goods, and give them to the poor save as a counsel of perfection; but he still makes the terrible declaration: "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvi. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvi. 19-25.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xix. 24.

In all this an admirable idea of profound import governed Jesus, as well as the band of joyous children his followers, and made him for eternity the true creator of the peace of the soul, the great consoler of life. In freeing man from what he called "the cares of this world," Jesus might go to excess and injure the essential conditions of human society; but he founded that spiritual exaltation which for centuries has filled souls with joy in the midst of this vale of tears. He saw with perfect clarity of vision that man's recklessness, his lack of philosophy and morality, most often proceed from the distractions which he permits himself, and the cares, multiplied beyond measure by civilisation, which harass him. The Gospel has thus been the supreme remedy for the dull weariness of common life, a perpetual *sursum corda*, a powerful agent in making men forget the miserable cares of earth, a gentle appeal like that which Jesus whispered in the ear of Martha, "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful."<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Jesus, the dullest existence, that most absorbed by sad or humiliating duties, has had its glimpse of heaven. In our busy civilisation the memory of the free life of Galilee has been like perfume from another world, like the "dew of Hermon," which has kept drought and grossness from entirely invading the fields of God.

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 41, 42.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD CONCEIVED AS THE ACCESSION TO  
POWER OF THE POOR.

THESE maxims, good for a land where life is nourished by the air and the light, and this subtle communism of a band of God's children resting in faith on the bosom of their Father, might be fitted for a simple sect, upheld by the constant expectation that its Utopia was about to be realised. But it is clear that they could not be attractive to society as a whole. Jesus, indeed, very soon understood that the official world of his time would by no means lend its support to his kingdom. He took his resolution with extreme daring. Leaving the world, with its hard heart and narrow prejudices, on one side, he turned towards the simple. A vast rearrangement of classes was to take place. The Kingdom of God was made—(1) for children and those like them; (2) for the world's outcasts, victims of that social arrogance which repulses the good but humble man; (3) for heretics and schismatics, publicans, Samaritans, and the pagans of Tyre and Sidon. A vigorously conceived parable explained this appeal to the people and justified it. A king has prepared a wedding feast, and sends his servants to seek those who have been invited. Each one excuses himself; some even maltreat the messengers. Then the

king takes a decisive step. The people of rank have not accepted his invitation. Be it so; his guests shall be the first-comers—the people gathered from the highways and byways, the poor, the beggars, the lame; it matters not who, for the room must be filled. “For I say unto you,” said he, “that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”<sup>1</sup>

Pure *Ebionism* then—the doctrine that the poor (*ebionim*) alone will be saved, that the reign of the poor is at hand—was the doctrine of Jesus. “Woe unto you that are rich,” he said, “for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you, ye that are full now! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you, ye that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.”<sup>2</sup> “And he said to him also that had bidden him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor rich neighbours, lest haply they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; because they have not wherewith to recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just.”<sup>3</sup> It was perhaps in a like sense that he often repeated, “Be good bankers,”<sup>4</sup>—that is to say, make good investments for the Kingdom of God by giving your wealth to the poor in conformity with the old proverb, “He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

There was nothing new indeed in all this. The most

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiv. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vi. 24, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xiv. 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> A saying preserved by very ancient tradition, and often quoted (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* i. 28). It is also found in Origen, St. Jerome, and a great number of the Fathers of the Church.

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs xix. 17.



exalted democratic movement in human annals (and too the only one which has succeeded, for it alone has maintained its position in the domain of pure thought) had long agitated the Jewish race. The thought that God is the avenger of the poor and weak against the rich and powerful is to be found on every page of the writings of the Old Testament. The history of Israel is, of all histories, that in which the popular spirit has been most constantly in power. Prophets, true, and, in one sense, the boldest of tribunes, thundered without ceasing against the great, and established a close connection, on the one hand, between the words "rich, impious, violent, wicked," on the other, between the words "poor, gentle, humble, pious." Under the Seleucidæ, the aristocrats, having almost all apostatised and gone over to Hellenism, such associations of ideas only became stronger. The Book of Enoch contains maledictions still more violent than those of the Gospel against the worldly, the wealthy, and the powerful. In it luxury is depicted as a crime. The "Son of man," in this strange apocalypse, dethrones kings, tears them from their voluptuous life, and casts them into hell. The initiation of Judæa to secular life, and the recent introduction of an entirely worldly element of luxury and comfort, provoked a furious reaction in favour of patriarchal simplicity. "Woe unto you who despise the humble dwelling and inheritance of your fathers! Woe unto you who build your palaces with the sweat of others! Each stone, each brick of which it is built, is a sin."<sup>1</sup> The name of "poor" (*ebion*) became a synonym of saint, of "friend of God." It was the name by which the Galilean disciples of Jesus loved to call themselves; for a long time it was the name of the Judaising

<sup>1</sup> Enoch xcix. 13, 14.

Christians of Batanea and the Hauran (Nazarenes, Hebrews) who remained faithful to the language, as well as to the primitive teaching of Jesus, and boasted that they had in their midst the descendants of his family. At the close of the second century these good sectaries, having remained outside the great current which had carried away all the other churches, were treated as heretics (*Ebionites*) and a pretended founder of their heresy (*Ebion*) was invented to explain their name.

It might have been easily foreseen that this exaggerated taste for poverty could not last very long. It was one of those Utopian elements, always to be found mingled in the beginnings of great movements, which time rectifies. Cast into the midst of human society, Christianity could not fail to consent very easily to the reception of rich men into her bosom, just as Buddhism, in its origin exclusively monastic, soon began, as conversions multiplied, to admit the laity. But a birthmark is always kept. Although it quickly passed away and was forgotten, Ebionism left, in the whole history of Christian institutions, a leaven which has not been lost. The collection of the *Logia*, or discourses of Jesus, was formed, or at least completed, in the Ebionite centre of Batanea. "Poverty" remained an ideal from which true descendants of Jesus were never afterwards separated. To possess nothing was the true evangelical state; mendicancy became a virtue, a state of holiness. The great Umbrian movement of the thirteenth century, which, of all attempts at religious construction, most resembles the Galilean movement, was entirely carried through in the name of poverty. Francis of Assisi, the one man who, by his exquisite goodness, by his delicate, pure, and tender communion with the life of the universe, beyond all others approached most

closely to Jesus, was a poor man. The mendicant orders, and the innumerable communistic sects of the Middle Ages (*Pauvres de Lyon, Bégards, Bons-Hommes, Fratricelles, Humiliés, Pauvres Évangéliques*, Votaries of the Eternal Gospel), claimed to be, and in fact were, the true disciples of Jesus. But, in this case too, the most impracticable dreams of the new religion were fruitful in results. Pious mendicity, of which our industrial and highly organised communities are so impatient, was, in its day and in a suitable climate, full of charm. To a multitude of mild and contemplative souls it offered the only fitting condition. To have made poverty an object of love and desire, to have exalted the beggar to the altar, and to have sanctified the garment of the poor man, was a master-touch which political economy may not appreciate, but in face of which no true moralist can remain indifferent. Mankind, in order to bear its burden, must needs believe that it is not paid entirely by wages. The greatest service that can be rendered it is to repeat often that it lives not by bread alone.

Like all great men, Jesus was fond of common folk, and felt at his ease with them. To his mind the Gospel was made for the poor; it was to them that he brought the good tidings of salvation. He particularly esteemed all those whom orthodox Judaism disdained. Love of the people, pity for its powerlessness—the feeling of the democratic leader who feels the spirit of the multitude quick within him, and knows himself to be its natural interpreter—reveal themselves at every instant in his acts and sayings.

The chosen flock in fact presented somewhat mingled characteristics, likely to astonish the rigorous moralist. It counted amongst its number people with whom a Jew who had any respect for himself would have refused to associate.

It may be that Jesus found in this society, unaffected by ordinary conventions, more distinction of intellect and goodness of heart than he would have done in a pedantic and narrow-minded middle class, priding itself on its outward morality. The Pharisees, exaggerating the Mosaic injunctions, had come to believe themselves defiled by contact with men less strict than themselves; with regard to their meals, they almost rivalled the puerile distinctions of caste in India. Despising such miserable aberrations of religious feeling, Jesus loved to eat with those who were its victims; by his side at table were seen persons reputed to be of evil life, owing their reputation perhaps to the fact that they did not share the follies of the false devotees. The Pharisees and doctors protested against the scandal. "See," said they, "with what men he eats!" Jesus returned subtle answers which exasperated the hypocrites. "They that are whole have no need of a physician;"<sup>1</sup> or again: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing."<sup>2</sup> Or again: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."<sup>3</sup> Or again: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."<sup>4</sup> Lastly, there is the beautiful parable of the prodigal son, in which he who has fallen is represented as having a kind of right to be loved above him who has always been righteous. Weak or guilty women, carried away with such charms, and realising, for the first time, the pleasures of contact with virtue, freely approached him.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ix. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xix. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xv. 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. ix. 13.

People were surprised that he did not repulse them. "Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is which toucheth him, that she is a sinner."<sup>1</sup> Jesus replied by the parable of the creditor who forgives his debtors' unequal debts, in which he did not hesitate to prefer the lot of him to whom the greatest debt was remitted. He appreciated states of soul only in proportion as they were inspired by love. Women with tearful hearts, through their sins inclined to feelings of humility, were nearer his kingdom than people of commonplace nature, who frequently have little merit in not having fallen. We may understand, on the other hand, how these tender souls, finding in their conversion to the sect an easy means of retrieving character, would passionately attach themselves to him.

Far from seeking to soothe the murmurings stirred up by his contempt for the social susceptibilities of the time, he seemed to find pleasure in exciting them. Never did any one more loftily avow that disdain of the "world" which is the essential condition of great things and great originality. He forgave the rich man, but only when the rich man, owing to some prejudice, was held in disfavour by society. He greatly preferred men of dubiously respectable life and of small consideration in the eyes of the orthodox leaders. "Verily I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him."<sup>2</sup> One can imagine how galling the reproach of not having

<sup>1</sup> Luke vii. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxi. 31, 32.

followed the good example set by prostitutes must have been to men who made a profession of seriousness and rigid morality.

He had no external affectation, and made no display of austerity. He did not shun pleasure; he willingly went to marriage feasts. One of his miracles was performed, it is said, to enliven a wedding in a small town. In the East weddings take place in the evening. Each of the guests carries a lamp; the lights, coming and going, give a charming effect. Jesus liked such a gay and animated scene and drew parables from it. Such conduct, compared with that of John the Baptist, gave offence. One day, when the disciples of John and the Pharisees were keeping the fast, it was asked, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast in that day."<sup>1</sup> His gentle gaiety found constant expression in vivid ideas and amiable pleasantries. "Whereunto then," said he, "shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like? They are like unto children that sit in the market-place and call one to another; which say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not weep. For John the Baptist is come, eating no bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. And wisdom is justified of all her children."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark ii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vii. 31 and following.

He thus journeyed through Galilee in the midst of continual festivities. He rode on a mule. In the East this is a good and safe method of travelling. The large black eyes of the animal, shaded by long eyelashes, give it a very gentle aspect. His disciples sometimes surrounded him with a kind of rustic pomp, at the expense of their garments which they used as carpets. They put them on the mule which carried him, or spread them on the ground in his path. When he entered a house it was considered a joy and a blessing. He stopped in villages and large farms, where he received warm hospitality. In the East, the house into which a stranger enters immediately becomes a public place. The whole village assembles in it, the children invade it, and, though driven away by the servants, always return. Jesus could not suffer these gentle hearers to be harshly treated. He had them brought to him and took them in his arms. Mothers, encouraged by such a reception, used to bring him their little ones, that he might touch them. Women came to pour oil upon his head and perfumes on his feet. His disciples would sometimes repulse them as troublesome; but Jesus, who loved ancient usages and all that showed simplicity of heart, made reparation for the unkindness done by his too zealous friends. He protected those who desired to do him honour. So it was that children and women adored him. The reproach of alienating from their families these gentle, easily led creatures was one of the charges most frequently brought against him by his enemies.

The new religion was thus, in many respects, a women's and children's movement. The latter were like a young guard about Jesus for the inauguration of his innocent kingship, and gave him little ovations which pleased him

much, calling him "Son of David," crying *Hosanna*, and bearing palms around him. Jesus, like Savonarola, perhaps made them serve as instruments for pious missions; he was very glad to see these young apostles, who did not compromise him, rush to the front and give him titles which he did not dare to take himself. He let them speak, and, when he was asked if he heard, he evasively answered that the praise that comes from young lips is the most pleasing to God.

He lost no occasion of repeating that the little ones are sacred beings, that the kingdom of God belongs to children, that one must become a child to enter therein, that one ought to receive it as a child, that the heavenly Father hides his secrets from the wise and reveals them to little ones. In his mind the idea of disciples is almost synonymous with that of children. On one occasion when they had one of those quarrels for precedence which were not rare amongst them, Jesus took a little child, put him in their midst, and said to them, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>1</sup>

It was childhood, in fact, in its divine spontaneity, in its simple bewilderment of joy, that took possession of the earth. Every man, at every moment, believed that the kingdom so greatly desired was at hand. Each one already saw himself seated on a throne at the side of the Master. They divided amongst themselves the places of honour in the new kingdom, and sought to calculate the precise date of its coming. The new doctrine was called the "Good Tidings"; it had no other name. An old word, *paradise*, which Hebrew, like all the languages of the East, had

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 4.



borrowed from the Persian, in which it originally designated the parks of the Achæmenidæ, summed up the general dream,—a beautiful garden where the delightful life here below would be eternally prolonged. How long did this intoxication last? We cannot tell. No one during the course of these enchanted visions, measured time any more than we measure a dream. Time was suspended in duration; a week was as an age. But, whether it filled years or months, the dream was so beautiful that humanity has lived upon it ever since, and it is still our consolation to gather its weakened perfume. Never did so much gladness fill the heart of man. For a moment humanity, in this, its most vigorous effort to soar above the world, forgot the leaden weight which binds it to earth, forgot the sorrows of the life below. Happy he to whom it has been granted to behold with his own eyes this divine blossoming, and to share, if but for a day, the incomparable illusion! But yet more happy, Jesus would tell us, shall he be who, freed from all illusion, shall conjure up within himself the celestial vision, and, with no millenarian dreams, no chimerical paradise, no signs in the heavens, but by the uprightness of his will and the poetry of his soul, shall be able to create anew in his own heart the true kingdom of God!

## CHAPTER XII.

THE EMBASSY FROM JOHN IN PRISON TO JESUS—DEATH OF JOHN—RELATIONS OF HIS SCHOOL WITH THAT OF JESUS.

WHILST joyous Galilee was celebrating with feasting the coming of the Well-beloved, the sorrowful John, in his prison of Machero, was pining away with yearning and desire. The successes of the young Master, whom he had seen for some months among his followers, reached his ears. It was said that the Messiah predicted by the prophets, he who was to set up the kingdom of Israel once more, had come and was proving his presence in Galilee by marvellous works. John wished to inquire into the truth of this rumour, and, as he was in free communication with his disciples, he chose two of them to go to Jesus in Galilee.

The two disciples found Jesus at the height of his fame. The atmosphere of joyfulness around him filled them with surprise. Accustomed to fasting, to incessant prayer, and to a life full of aspiration, they were astonished at finding themselves suddenly brought into the midst of the joys attending the welcome of the Messiah. They gave Jesus their message: "Art thou he that cometh? Or look we for another?"<sup>1</sup> Jesus, who, from that time forth, had no

<sup>1</sup> Luke vii. 20.

longer any doubt with respect to his own position as the Messiah, enumerated to them the works which ought to characterise the coming of the kingdom of God—such as the healing of the sick, and the good tidings of speedy salvation preached to the poor. All these works he himself did. “And blessed is he,” added Jesus, “whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me.”<sup>1</sup> Whether this answer reached John the Baptist before his death, or what effect it had on the austere ascetic, is not known. Did he die consoled in the certainty that he whom he had announced was already living, or did he remain dubious as to the mission of Jesus? There is nothing to inform us. Seeing, however, that his school continued to exist for a considerable time contemporaneously with the Christian churches, there is reason to suppose that, notwithstanding his regard for Jesus, John did not look upon him as having realised the divine promises. Death moreover came to cut short his perplexities. The invincible freedom of the lonely ascetic was to crown his restless career of persecution with the only end which was worthy of it.

The leniency which Antipas had at first shown towards John was not to last long. In the conversations which, according to Christian tradition, John had had with the tetrarch, he never ceased to tell him that his marriage was unlawful and that he ought to send Herodias away. It is easy to imagine the hatred which the grand-daughter of Herod the Great must necessarily have had for this importunate counsellor. She only waited an opportunity to ruin him.

Her daughter, Salome, born of her first marriage, and, like herself, ambitious and dissolute, aided her in her

<sup>1</sup> Luke vii. 23.

designs. In that year (probably the year 30) Antipas was at Machero on the anniversary of his birthday. Herod the Great had had constructed in the interior of the fortress a magnificent palace, where the tetrarch frequently resided. There he gave a great feast, during which Salome performed one of those characteristic dances which, in Syria, were not considered as unbecoming a lady of distinction. Antipas being much pleased, asked the dancer what she most desired, and she replied, at her mother's instigation: "I will that thou forthwith give me in a charger the head of John the Baptist."<sup>1</sup> Antipas was sorry, but he did not care to refuse. A guard took the dish, went and cut off the prisoner's head, and brought it in.

The disciples of the Baptist obtained his body and laid it in a tomb, but the people were much displeased. Six years after, Hareth, having attacked Antipas, in order to recover Machero and avenge his daughter's dishonour, Antipas was vanquished; and his defeat was generally looked upon as being a punishment for the murder of John.

The news of John's death was carried to Jesus by the disciples of the Baptist. The last step taken by John with regard to Jesus had effectually united the two schools in the closest bonds. Jesus, fearing an increase of ill-will on the part of Antipas, took precautions and retired into the desert, where many people followed him. By the exercise of extreme frugality, the holy company found it possible to live there; and in this a miracle was naturally seen. From this time Jesus always spoke of John with redoubled admiration. He declared without hesitation that he was more than a prophet, that the Law and the ancient prophets had

<sup>1</sup> Mark vi. 25.

had their force only until his coming, that he had abrogated them, but that the kingdom of heaven would abrogate him in turn. In short, he attributed to him a special place in the scheme of the Christian mystery, which constituted him the link of union between the reign of the ancient covenant and that of the new kingdom.

The prophet Malachi, whose opinion in this matter was eagerly cited, had with much force announced a precursor of the Messiah, who was to prepare men for the final regeneration, a messenger who should come to make straight the ways before the chosen one of God. This messenger was none other than the prophet Elias, who, according to a widely-spread belief, was soon to descend from heaven, whither he had been borne, that he might prepare men by repentance for the great advent, and reconcile God with his people. Sometimes with Elias was associated either the patriarch Enoch, to whom for one or two centuries high sanctity had been attributed, or Jeremiah, who was regarded as a kind of tutelary genius of the people, constantly engaged in praying for them before the throne of God. This idea of the imminent resurrection of two ancient prophets to serve as heralds of the Messiah is also to be discovered in so striking a form in the doctrine of the Parsees, that we feel much inclined to believe that it came from Persia. However this may be, it formed at the time of Jesus an integral part of the Jewish theories about the Messiah. It was admitted that the appearance of "two faithful witnesses," clad in garments of repentance, would be the prologue of the great drama which was about to be unfolded to the amazement of the universe.

That, with these ideas, Jesus and his disciples could have no doubt as to the mission of John the Baptist is easily

understood. When the Scribes raised the objection that it was still a question whether the Messiah could really have come, since Elias had not yet appeared, they replied that Elias had come, that John was Elias raised from the dead. By his manner of life, by his opposition to the political authorities in power, John in fact recalled that strange figure in the ancient history of Israel. Jesus was not silent on the merits and excellences of his forerunner. He said that no greater man had been born amongst the children of men. He forcibly rebuked the Pharisees and the doctors for not having accepted his baptism, and for not being converted at his voice.

The disciples of Jesus were faithful to these principles of their Master. Respect for John was a constant tradition during the first Christian generation. He was reputed to be a relative of Jesus. In order to establish the latter's mission upon universally accepted testimony, it was asserted that John, when he first saw Jesus, proclaimed him the Messiah; that he recognised himself to be his inferior, unworthy to loosen the latchets of his shoes; that at first he declined to baptise him, maintaining that it was he who ought to be baptised by Jesus. These were exaggerations which are sufficiently refuted by the dubious form of John's last message. But, in a more general sense, John remains in the Christian legend what, in reality, he was—the austere harbinger, the gloomy preacher of repentance before the joy of the bridegroom's coming, the prophet who announces the kingdom of God and dies without beholding it. This giant of the early history of Christianity, this eater of locusts and wild honey, this fierce redresser of wrongs, was the bitter wormwood which prepared the lips for the sweetness of the kingdom of God. His execution by Herodias inaugurated

the era of Christian martyrs; he was the first witness for the new faith. The worldly, who in him recognised their true foe, could not suffer him to live; his mutilated corpse, stretched on the threshold of Christianity, showed the bloody path in which so many others were to follow after him.

The school of John did not die with its founder. For some time it survived in a form distinct from that of Jesus, and at first the two were on good terms. Several years after the death of both masters, people were baptised with the baptism of John. Certain persons belonged to both schools at the same time, for example, the celebrated Apollos, the rival of St. Paul (about the year 54), and a large number of the Christians in Ephesus. Josephus, in the year 53, listened to the teaching of an ascetic called Banou, who greatly resembled John the Baptist, and was perhaps of his school. This Banou dwelt in the desert and clothed himself with the leaves of trees; he lived on nothing but wild plants and fruits, and baptised himself frequently, both day and night, in order to purify himself. James, he who was called the "brother of the Lord," practised similar asceticism. Later, about the end of the first century, Baptism was at enmity with Christianity, especially in Asia Minor. The author of the writings attributed to John the evangelist appears to combat it in an indirect way. One of the Sibylline poems seems to emanate from this school. As to the sects of Hemerobaptists, Baptists, and Elchasaïtes (*Sabiens* and *Mogtasila* of the Arabian writers), representatives of which still survive under the name of Mendaïtes, or "Christians of St. John," they have the same origin as the movement of John the Baptist rather than an authentic descent from John. The actual school

of the latter, partly mingled with Christianity, became a small Christian heresy and died out in obscurity. John had as it were a presentiment of the future. Had he yielded to a mean rivalry, he would now be forgotten in the multitude of sectaries of his time. By his self-abnegation he has attained a glorious and a unique position in the religious pantheon of humanity.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## FIRST ATTEMPTS ON JERUSALEM.

NEARLY every year Jesus went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. The details of these journeys are little known, for the Synoptics do not speak of them, and the notes of the fourth Gospel are, on this point, much confused. It was, it appears, in the year 31, and certainly after the death of John, that the most important of the visits of Jesus to the capital took place. Several of the disciples accompanied him. Although Jesus, from that time, attached little importance to the pilgrimage, he conformed to it in order to avoid wounding Jewish opinion, with which, as yet, he had not broken. These journeys were moreover essential to his design; for he already felt that to play a leading part he must leave Galilee, and attack Judaism in its stronghold, Jerusalem.

There the little Galilean community was far from feeling at home: Jerusalem was then very much what it is to-day, a city of pedantry, acrimony, disputation, hatreds, and pettiness of mind. Its fanaticism was extreme, and religious seditions were very frequent. The Pharisees were in supreme power; the study of the Law, carried to consideration of the most insignificant minutiae and reduced to questions of casuistry, was the only study. Such exclusively

theological and canonical culture in no respect contributed to refinement of intellect. It was somewhat analogous to the barren doctrine of the Mussulman fakir, to that empty science discussed round the mosques, which is a great expenditure of time and absolutely useless dialectic, having no value as an agent of good mental discipline. The theological education of the modern clergy, however sterile it may be, gives us no idea of this, for the Renaissance introduced into all our teaching, even into that most opposed to it, a taste for *belles lettres* and for method, which has infused a certain "human" element into scholasticism. The science of the Jewish doctor, of the *Sofer* or Scribe, was purely barbarous, unmitigatedly absurd, and devoid of any moral element. To crown the evil, it filled with ridiculous pride those who had worn themselves out in its acquisition. The Jewish Scribe, proud of the pretentious knowledge which had cost him so much labour, had for Greek culture the same contempt which the learned Mussulman has at the present day for European civilisation, and which the old Catholic theologian had for the knowledge of men of the world. The tendency of scholastic culture of this kind is to close the mind to all that is refined, and to banish appreciation of anything other than those difficult triflings on which men have wasted their lives, regarding them as the natural occupation of persons professing any degree of seriousness.

This odious society could not fail to weigh very heavily on the tender souls and upright consciences of the northern Israelites. The contempt of the Hierosolymites for the Galileans made the difference in temperament still more complete. In the beautiful Temple, the object of all their desires, they often met with nothing but affront. A verse of the

pilgrim's psalm, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God,"<sup>1</sup> seemed as though expressly made for them. A disdainful priesthood laughed at their simple devotions, as formerly in Italy the clergy, familiarised with the sanctuaries, witnessed coldly, almost with amusement, the fervour of the pilgrim come from afar. The Galileans spoke a somewhat corrupt dialect; their pronunciation was vicious; they confounded the different aspirations of letters, thus making mistakes which caused much merriment. In religion they were considered ignorant and of dubious orthodoxy—indeed, the expression "foolish Galileans" had become proverbial. It was believed—and not without reason—that they were not of pure Jewish blood; and it was a matter of course that Galilee could not produce a prophet. Placed thus on the confines of Judaism, almost outside it, the poor Galileans had only one badly interpreted passage in Isaiah upon which to build their hopes. "The land of Zebulon, and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, Galilee of the nations! The people which sat in darkness saw a great light: and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, to them did the light spring up."<sup>2</sup> The reputation of the native city of Jesus was particularly bad. There was a popular proverb, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"<sup>3</sup>

The very barren aspect of nature in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem must have added to the discomfort of Jesus. The valleys are without water, the soil arid and stony. Looking into the valley of the Dead Sea, the landscape is somewhat striking, but elsewhere it is monotonous. The

<sup>1</sup> Psalm lxxxiv. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah ix. 1, 2; Matt. iv. 13 and following.

<sup>3</sup> John i. 46.

hill of Mizpeh, around which cluster the oldest historical associations of Israel, alone relieves the eye. In the time of Jesus the city presented very much the same aspect as it does now. It had scarcely any ancient monuments, for, until the time of the Asmoneans, the Jews had remained strangers to all the arts. John Hyrcanus had begun to embellish it, and Herod the Great had made it a superb city. The Herodian constructions, by their stately elevation, perfection of execution, and beauty of materials, may dispute superiority with the most finished works of antiquity. A large number of tombs, of original taste, were erected about the same period in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. These monuments were Greek in style, but appropriate to Jewish customs and considerably modified in accordance with their principles. The ornamental sculptures of the human figure, in which the Herods had indulged to the great displeasure of the purists, were banished and replaced by floral decorations. The taste of the ancient inhabitants of Phœnicia and Palestine for monolithic monuments hewn in the solid rock seemed to be revived in these singular rock tombs, in which Greek styles are so strangely applied to a troglodyte architecture. Jesus, who regarded works of art as a pompous display of vanity, viewed these monuments with dislike. His absolute spirituality and his fixed belief that the form of the old world was about to pass away, left him no taste save for things of the heart.

The Temple, at the time of Jesus, was quite new, and its exterior was not completely finished. Herod had begun its restoration in the year 20 or 21 before the Christian era, in order to make it uniform with his other buildings. The main fabric of the temple was completed in eighteen months, the porticoes in eight years; but the construction

of the accessory portions was continued slowly, and was only finished a short time before the capture of Jerusalem. Jesus probably saw the work in progress, not without a touch of secret vexation. Such hopes of a long future were like an insult to his approaching advent. Having clearer sight than the unbelievers and the fanatics, he foresaw that these superb buildings were destined to endure for but a short time.

The Temple formed a marvellously imposing whole, of which the present *Haram*, notwithstanding its beauty, scarcely affords any conception. The courts and surrounding porticoes served as the daily resort of a great number of people—so much so indeed that this great open space was at once temple, forum, tribunal, and university. All the religious discussions of the Jewish schools, all the canonical instruction, even the legal business and civil actions—in a word, all the national activity, was concentrated there. It was an arena resounding with perpetual disputations, a battle-field of arguments in which sophisms and subtle questions were to be heard on every side. Thus the Temple had many affinities with a Mohammedan mosque. The Romans, who at this period treated all foreign religions with respect, when kept within proper bounds, refrained from entering the sanctuary; Greek and Latin inscriptions marked the point up to which those who were not Jews were permitted to go. But the tower of Antonia, the headquarters of the Roman garrison, commanded the whole enclosure, and allowed all that passed therein to be seen. The surveillance of the Temple was in the hands of the Jews. The commandant, in whose charge it was, superintended the opening and shutting of the gates, and prevented any one from crossing the enclosure with a

stick in his hand, or with dusty shoes, or when carrying burdens, or to shorten his path. The Temple officials were especially scrupulous in seeing that no one entered the inner gates in a state of legal impurity. The women had, in the middle of the outer court, places reserved for them, surrounded by wooden hoardings.

It was in the Temple that Jesus spent his days during his sojourn at Jerusalem. At the time of the feasts an extraordinary concourse of people flocked into the town. In parties of ten to twenty persons the pilgrims were to be found everywhere, and lived, huddled together in the confusion in which Orientals delight. Jesus was lost in the crowd, and his poor Galileans, grouped around him, made little impression. He probably felt that here he was in a hostile world which would receive him only with disdain. All that he saw aroused his aversion. The Temple, like largely frequented places of worship in general, offered a somewhat unedifying spectacle. The devotional services entailed a number of rather objectionable features, especially mercantile operations, for carrying on which actual shops were established within the sacred enclosure. Animals for the sacrifices were sold in them; there were tables for the exchange of money; at times the place had the aspect of a fair. The inferior officers of the Temple no doubt fulfilled their functions with the irreligious vulgarity characteristic of sacristans at all times. This profane and careless manner of handling sacred things wounded the religious feeling of Jesus, which, at times, was carried to an extreme of scrupulosity. He said that they had made the house of prayer into a den of thieves. It is even related that one day, in an outbreak of wrath, he scourged the vendors with a "scourge of cords," and overturned their tables. On

the whole, he had little love for the Temple. The ideal of worship of his Father which he had conceived had nothing in common with scenes of butchery. All these old Jewish institutions displeased him, and the necessity of conforming to them gave him pain. Nor, except among the Judaising Christians, did the Temple and its site inspire devout feelings in Christian hearts. The true disciples of the new religion held the ancient sanctuary in aversion. Constantine and the first Christian emperors left the pagan buildings of Adrian standing there, and only enemies of Christianity, such as Julian, remembered the Temple. When Omar entered Jerusalem he found the site designedly polluted in hatred of the Jews. It was Islamism, which was, in a manner, a revival of Judaism in its excessively Semitic form, which restored its glory. The place has always been anti-Christian.

The pride of the Jews was the element which completed the discontent of Jesus, and made his sojourn in Jerusalem painful. While the great ideas of Israel had been ripening, the priesthood had in the same measure been losing its power. The institution of synagogues had given to the interpreter of the Law, to the doctor, a great superiority over the priest. There were no priests except at Jerusalem, and even there, reduced to entirely ritualistic functions, almost, like our parish priests, excluded from preaching, they were surpassed by the orator of the synagogue, the casuist, and by the *Sofer* or Scribe, although the latter was a layman. The celebrated men of the Talmud were not priests; they were learned men according to the ideas of the time. It is true that the higher priesthood of Jerusalem held very lofty rank in the nation; but it by no means headed the religious movement. The sovereign

pontiff, whose dignity had already been degraded by Herod, became more and more a Roman functionary, who was frequently changed in order to divide the profits of the office. Opposed to the Pharisees, who were very enthusiastic lay zealots, nearly all the priests were Sadducees, that is to say, members of the sceptical aristocracy which had gathered round the Temple, living by the altar whilst they saw its vanity. The priestly caste had separated itself so far from national feeling and from the great religious movement which drew the people forward, that the name of "Sadducee" (*Sadoki*), which at first simply designated a member of the sacerdotal family of Sadok, had become synonymous with "materialist" and "Epicurean."

Since the reign of Herod the Great a still worse element had begun to corrupt the high-priesthood. Herod, having fallen in love with Mariamne, daughter of a certain Simon, son of Boëthus of Alexandria, and being anxious to marry her (about the year 28 B.C.), saw no other means of ennobling his father-in-law and raising him to his own rank than that of making him high-priest. This intriguing family remained masters, almost without interruption, of the sovereign pontificate for thirty-five years. In close alliance with the reigning family, it did not lose office until after the deposition of Archelaus, and recovered it (in the year 42 of our era) when Herod Agrippa had temporarily re-established the work of Herod the Great. Thus came into being, under the name of *Boëthusim*, a new sacerdotal nobility, very worldly and undevotional, which was hardly to be distinguished from the Sadokites. The *Boëthusim*, in the Talmud and the rabbinical writings, are depicted as unbelievers and always reproached as being Sadducees. From all this there resulted a miniature Cardinals' College



round the Temple, living on politics, very slightly moved to excesses of zeal and even suspicious of them, turning a deaf ear to the reports of holy men or reformers; for it derived profit from the continuance of the established routine. These Epicurean priests had not the violence of the Pharisees; they only wished for quietude; it was their moral indifference, their cold irreligious feeling that disgusted Jesus. Thus, although they differed widely from each other, priests and Pharisees were confounded in his antipathy. But, as a stranger lacking influence, he was long compelled to lock his discontent within himself and to express his feelings only to the intimate disciples who accompanied him.

Before his last stay, which was by far the longest of all that he made at Jerusalem, and terminated in his death, Jesus endeavoured however to procure a hearing. He preached; people talked about him, and discussed certain of his deeds which were regarded as miraculous. But from all this there resulted neither a Church at Jerusalem nor even a group of Hierosolymite disciples. The winning teacher who gave forgiveness to all men, provided they loved him, could not find much that was congenial in this sanctuary of vain disputations and obsolete sacrifices. The only consequence was that he formed some valuable friendships, the fruits of which he reaped later. He does not appear at this time to have made the acquaintance of the family at Bethany, which, amidst the trials of the latter months of his life, brought him so much consolation. But perhaps he had some intercourse with Mary, mother of Mark, whose house, some years later, was a place of resort for the apostles, and with Mark himself. Soon, too, he attracted the notice of a certain Nicodemus, a wealthy

Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrim, and a man of high position in Jerusalem. Nicodemus, who appears to have been upright and sincere, felt himself drawn towards the young Galilean. Unwilling to compromise himself, he came to see Jesus by night, and had a long conversation with him. There can be no doubt that he kept a favourable impression of him, for he afterwards defended Jesus against the prejudices of his colleagues, and, after the death of Jesus, we shall find him tending the corpse of the Master with pious care. Nicodemus did not become a Christian; he believed that, as a duty to his position, he should take no part in a revolutionary movement which as yet counted no men of note amongst its adherents. But he felt great friendship for Jesus, and rendered him services, though he was unable to rescue him from a death which, even at this epoch, was all but inevitable.

As to the celebrated doctors of the time, Jesus does not appear to have had any relations with them. Hillel and Shammai were dead; the greatest contemporary authority was Gamaliel, grandson of Hillel. He was broad-minded and a man of the world, open to secular culture, and habituated to tolerance by his intercourse with good society. Unlike the very strict Pharisees, who walked veiled or with closed eyes, he did not scruple to look upon women, even those who were pagans. This, as well as his knowledge of Greek, was excused, since he had access to the court. After the death of Jesus he expressed very moderate views concerning the new sect. St. Paul belonged to his school, but it is improbable that Jesus ever entered it.

One idea at least, brought by Jesus from Jerusalem and apparently thenceforth rooted in his mind, was that there was no understanding possible between him and the ancient

Jewish religion. The abolition of the sacrifices which caused him so much disgust, the suppression of the impious and haughty priesthood, and, in a general sense, the abrogation of the Law, seemed to him absolutely essential. From this time he no longer took his stand as a Jewish reformer, but as a destroyer of Judaism. Certain partisans of the Messianic ideas had already declared that the Messiah would bring with him a new Law, which should be common to the whole world. The Essenes, who were not, strictly speaking, Jews, also appear to have been indifferent towards the Temple and Mosaic observances. But these were only isolated or unavowed instances of audacity. Jesus was the first who dared to say that from his time, or rather from that of John, the Law no longer existed. If occasionally he expressed himself in more prudent terms, it was to avoid shocking existing prejudices too violently. When driven to extremities, he flung off all disguise and declared that the Law had no longer any force. To illustrate the point he used striking comparisons. "No man putteth a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment . . . neither do men put new wine into old wine-skins."<sup>1</sup> In this we see his authoritative and creative teaching put into practice. All except Jews were excluded from the Temple and its enclosure by scornful prohibitions. Of such prohibitions Jesus did not approve. The narrow, harsh, uncharitable Law was made only for the children of Abraham. Jesus maintained that every man of good heart, every man who received and loved him, was a son of Abraham. Pride of blood appeared to him as the great foe that men must fight against. In other words, Jesus is no longer a Jew. He is, in the highest degree, a revolu-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ix. 16, 17.

tionary; he calls all men to a worship founded solely on the ground of their being children of God. He proclaims the rights of man, not the rights of the Jew; the religion of man, not the religion of the Jew; the deliverance of man, not the deliverance of the Jew. How far removed is this from a Gaulonite Judas or a Matthias Margaloth preaching revolution in the name of the Law! The religion of humanity, based, not upon blood, but upon the heart, is founded. Moses is superseded, the Temple has no longer reason to be, and is irrevocably condemned.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE INTERCOURSE OF JESUS WITH PAGANS AND  
SAMARITANS.

IN accordance with these principles, Jesus despised all religion that was not of the heart. The vain ceremonial of devotees, the outward display of strictness which trusted to punctiliousness for salvation, had in him a mortal enemy. He cared little for fasting. To sacrifice he preferred the pardon of an injury. Love of God, charity, and mutual forgiveness—in these consisted his whole law. Nothing could be less sacerdotal. The priest, by very reason of his office, ever urges men to the public sacrifice of which he is the appointed minister; he discourages private prayer, which is a means of dispensing with his services. We should seek in vain through the Gospel for one religious rite recommended by Jesus. To him baptism was of but secondary importance; and as to prayer, he lays down no rule, save that it should come from the heart. As always happens, many thought it possible to substitute the goodwill of weakly souls for genuine love of righteousness, and imagined they could win the kingdom of heaven by saying to him, "Rabbi, Rabbi." He rebuked them and declared that his religion consisted in doing good. He often quoted

the passage in Isaiah: "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."<sup>1</sup>

The observance of the Sabbath was the point upon which the whole edifice of Pharisaic scruples and subtleties was based. This ancient and excellent institution had become a pretext for miserable disputes among casuists, and a source of superstitious beliefs. It was believed that nature observed it; all intermittent springs were accounted "Sabbatical." And it was upon this point that Jesus liked best to defy his enemies. He openly violated the Sabbath, and only responded with subtle raillery to the reproaches heaped upon him. With still greater justification he held in contempt a multitude of modern observances added by tradition to the Law, and for precisely that reason the dearer to devotees. Ablutions and over-subtle distinctions between pure and impure things found in him a pitiless opponent: "Not that which entereth into the mouth," said he, "defileth the man; but that which proceedeth out of the mouth, this defileth the man."<sup>2</sup> The Pharisees, who were the propagators of these mummeries, were the constant objects of his attacks. He accused them of exceeding the Law, of inventing impossible precepts, in order to create occasions of sin for men. "Blind leaders of the blind," said he; "take heed lest ye also fall into the ditch." "Ye offspring of vipers," he secretly added, "how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."<sup>3</sup>

He was not sufficiently acquainted with the Gentiles to think of founding any lasting results on their conversion. In Galilee there was a great number of pagans, but

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xv. 8, Mark vii 6; cf. Isaiah xxix. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xv. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xii. 34.

apparently no public and organised worship of false gods. Jesus could see this worship displayed in all its splendour in the country of Tyre and Sidon, at Cæsarea Philippi and in the Decapolis, but he gave it little attention. In him we never find the tiresome pedantry of his Jewish contemporaries, those invectives against idolatry, so familiar to his co-religionists from the time of Alexander, of which, for instance, the Book of Wisdom is full. What impressed him in the pagans was not their idolatry but their servility. The young Jewish democrat, in this matter the brother of Judas the Gaulonite, acknowledging no master save God, was deeply hurt at the honours with which they surrounded the persons of sovereigns, and the frequently mendacious titles given to the latter. With this exception, in the greater number of instances in which he has relations with pagans, he shows great indulgence towards them. At times he professes to conceive more hope for them than for the Jews. The kingdom of God is to be transferred to them. "When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen? . . . He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."<sup>1</sup> Jesus adhered the more to this idea inasmuch as the conversion of the Gentiles was, according to Jewish ideas, one of the surest signs of the advent of the Messiah. In his kingdom of God he represents, seated at the feast by the side of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, men come from the four winds of heaven, whilst the lawful heirs of the kingdom are rejected. Frequently, it is true, there appears to be an entirely contrary tendency in the commands given by him to his

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxi. 40, 41.

disciples; he seems to enjoin them to preach salvation to the orthodox Jews alone; he speaks of pagans in a manner conformable to Jewish prejudices. But it must be remembered that the disciples, whose narrow minds were not adapted to such supreme indifference for the privileges of the sons of Abraham, may have moulded their Master's teaching in accordance with their own ideas. And besides it is very possible that Jesus may have expressed diverse views on this matter, just as Mahomet speaks of the Jews in the Koran, sometimes in the most honourable manner, sometimes with extreme harshness, as he had hopes of winning them over to him or not. Tradition, in fact, attributes to Jesus two entirely opposite rules of proselytism, which, it is possible, he may have put in practice alternately. "He that is not against us is for us."<sup>1</sup> "He that is not with me is against me."<sup>2</sup> A passionate struggle almost necessarily involves contradictions of this nature.

It is certain that among his disciples he counted many men whom the Jews called "Hellenes." In Palestine this word had very diverse meanings. Occasionally it designated pagans; occasionally Jews, speaking Greek, and dwelling amongst pagans; occasionally people of pagan origin converted to Judaism. It was probably in the last named category of Hellenes that Jesus found sympathy. Affiliation to Judaism had many degrees, but the proselytes always remained in a state of inferiority to the Jew by birth. They were called "proselytes of the gate," or "men fearing God," and were subject to the precepts of Noah, not to those of Moses. This very inferiority was no doubt the cause that attracted Jesus to them, and won them his favour.

<sup>1</sup> Mark ix. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xii. 30.



The Samaritans received the same treatment at his hands. Shut in, like a small island, between the two great provinces of Judaism, Judæa and Galilee, Samaria formed in Palestine a kind of enclosure in which was preserved the ancient worship of Gerizim, closely resembling and rivalling that of Jerusalem. This poor sect, which had neither the genius nor the learned organisation of Judaism proper, was treated by the Hierosolymites with extreme severity. They classed its adherents with pagans but hated them more. Jesus, by a reaction of feeling, was well disposed towards them. Frequently he shows a preference for the Samaritans over the orthodox Jews. If at other times he seems to forbid his disciples to preach to them, keeping his Gospel for the real Israelites, this was probably another precept, occasioned by special circumstances, to which the apostles have given too absolute a meaning. Sometimes in fact the Samaritans received him badly, supposing him to be full of the prejudices of his co-religionists—just as in our own time the European freethinker is regarded as an enemy by the Mussulman, who invariably believes him to be a fanatical Christian. Jesus knew how to rise above such misconceptions. He apparently had several disciples at Shechem, and he spent at least two days there. On one occasion he met with gratitude and true piety only in the house of a Samaritan. One of his most beautiful parables is that of the man who was wounded on the way to Jericho. A priest passes by and sees him, but goes on his way; a Levite also passes, but does not stop; a Samaritan takes pity on him, goes up to him, and pours oil into his wounds and bandages them. From this Jesus argues that true brotherhood is established among men by charity and not by religious creeds. The “neighbour,” who in Judaism is

essentially the co-religionist, is for him the man who has pity on his kind without distinction of sect. Human brotherhood in its widest sense overflows through all his teaching.

These thoughts, which beset Jesus on his departure from Jerusalem, found vivid expression in an anecdote which has been preserved regarding his return. The road from Jerusalem to Galilee passes at a distance of half-an-hour's journey from Shechem, now Nablous, in front of the entrance to the valley commanded by Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. This route was usually avoided by Jewish pilgrims, who, in their journeys, preferred to make a long detour through Perea, rather than expose themselves to the insults of the Samaritans or ask anything of them. Eating or drinking with them was forbidden. One of the axioms of certain casuists was, "a piece of Samaritan bread is the flesh of swine." When they followed this route, provisions were always stored beforehand; yet conflict and ill-treatment were rarely avoided. Jesus shared neither scruples nor fears of this nature. Having in his journey reached the point at which the valley of Shechem opens out on the left, he felt weary and stopped near a well. Then as now the Samaritans were accustomed to give names drawn from patriarchal tradition to all the places in their valley. They regarded this well as having been given by Jacob to Joseph; it was probably the same well that is called *Bir-Iakoub*. The disciples entered the valley and went to the city to buy food. Jesus sat down at the side of the well, facing Gerizim.

It was about noon. A woman belonging to Shechem came to draw water. Jesus asked her to let him drink,

which caused her great astonishment, since the Jews, as a rule, forbade all intercourse with Samaritans. Impressed by the conversation of Jesus, the woman recognised in him a prophet, and, expecting to hear reproaches about her worship, she anticipated them: "Sir," said she, "I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth."<sup>1</sup>

On the day when he said these words he was truly Son of God. For the first time he gave utterance to the saying upon which will rest the edifice of eternal religion. He founded that pure worship, not of one faith and not of one land, which all men lofty of soul will practise till the end of time. Not only was his religion on that day the best religion of humanity, it was the absolute religion; and if it be that other planets have dwellers dowered with reason and morality, their religion cannot be different from that which Jesus proclaimed by the well of Jacob. Man has not been able to maintain the position, for the ideal is but transitorily realised. This saying of Jesus has been a great light amidst the darkness of night; eighteen hundred years have been necessary for the eyes of mankind—what do I say! of an infinitely small part of mankind—to have grown accustomed to it. But the light will increase to the fulness of day, and, after having traversed all the cycles of error, mankind will return to this saying, as to the immortal expression of its faith and its hope.

<sup>1</sup> John iv. 20-23.

## CHAPTER XV.

THE EARLY GROWTH OF THE LEGENDS CONCERNING JESUS  
— HIS OWN CONCEPTION OF HIS SUPERNATURAL  
CHARACTER.

JESUS returned to Galilee full of revolutionary ardour, and with his Jewish faith completely lost. His ideas are now expressed with perfect clarity. The innocent aphorisms of his first prophetic period, borrowed in part from Jewish rabbis preceding him, and the beautiful moral precepts of his second period, culminate in a decided policy. The Law is to be abolished, and it is he that will abolish it. The Messiah is come, and it is he that is the Messiah. The kingdom of God is about to be revealed, and it is he that will reveal it. He knew well that he would be the victim of his own audacity; but the kingdom of God could not be conquered without violence; it was by crises and rending of hearts that it had to be established. The Son of man after his death would come again in glory, attended by legions of angels, and those who had rejected him would be confounded.

The daring of a conception such as this must not surprise us. For a long time Jesus had been accustomed to regard his relations with God as those of a son with his father.

What in others would be insupportable pride must not in him be looked upon as presumption.

The title of "Son of David" was the first which he accepted, probably without participating in the innocent frauds by which it was sought to secure it to him. The family of David was apparently long since extinct; neither the Asmoneans from their priestly origin, nor Herod, nor the Romans dreamed for a moment that any representative whatever of the ancient dynasty was living in their midst. But since the close of the Asmonean dynasty the dream of an unknown descendant of the ancient kings, who should avenge the nation on its enemies, had been exercising all men's minds. The universal belief was that the Messiah would be the son of David, and, like him, would be born at Bethlehem. The first idea of Jesus was not precisely this. His heavenly reign had nothing in common with the memories of David, which were uppermost in the minds of the majority of the Jews. He believed himself the son of God and not the son of David. His kingdom and the deliverance which he meditated were of quite another order. But public opinion on this point made him, as it were, do violence to himself. The immediate consequence of the proposition, "Jesus is the Messiah," was the farther proposition, "Jesus is the Son of David." He permitted a title to be given him, lacking which he could hope for no success. He ended, it would seem, by taking pleasure in it, for he showed most willingness in performing the miracles which were asked of him by those who used this title in addressing him. In this, as in many other circumstances of his life, Jesus yielded to the current ideas of the age, even although they were not precisely his own. With his doctrine of the "kingdom of God" he associated

all that could warm the heart and imagination. It was thus that we have seen him adopt the baptism of John, although it could have been but of slight importance to him.

One great difficulty presented itself—his birth at Nazareth, which was of public notoriety. We do not know whether Jesus combated this objection. Perhaps it did not come to light in Galilee, where the idea that the Son of David should be a Bethlehemite was less widely diffused. To the Galilean enthusiast moreover the title of Son of David was sufficiently justified, if he to whom it was given revived the glory of his race and brought back the great days of Israel. Did Jesus authorise by his silence the fictitious genealogies that arose in the imaginations of his partisans to prove his royal descent? Did he know anything of the legends invented to demonstrate his birth at Bethlehem, and particularly of the artifice by which his Bethlehemite origin was connected with the census which had taken place by order of Quirinius, the imperial legate? We cannot tell. The inexactitude and the contradictions of the genealogies lead one to think that they were the result of popular imagination working on various points, and that none were sanctioned by Jesus. He never designated himself Son of David. His disciples, much less enlightened than he, frequently magnified what he said of himself; but, as a rule, he had no knowledge of these exaggerations. It should be added that, during the first three centuries, considerable portions of Christendom persistently denied the royal descent of Jesus and the authenticity of the genealogies.

The legends about him were thus the fruits of a great and entirely spontaneous conspiracy, and grew up around him while he was still alive. No great historical event has

occurred without having given rise to a cycle of myths; and Jesus could not have prevented these popular creations, even had he wished to do so. Perhaps an acute observer would have recognised at this point the appearance of the germ of the narratives which were to attribute to him a supernatural birth, founded, it may be, on the idea, which was very prevalent in antiquity, that the incomparable man could not be born of ordinary sexual relations; or adapted to correspond to an imperfectly understood chapter of Isaiah, which, it was believed, foretold that the Messiah should be born of a virgin; or lastly, perhaps, occasioned by the belief that the "breath of God," already given a divine hypostasis, was a principle of fecundity. Even at this time there was possibly current more than one anecdote about his childhood, conceived with the intention of showing in his life the accomplishment of the Messianic ideal, or rather of the prophecies which the allegorical exegesis of the period referred to the Messiah. A generally accepted idea was that the Messiah would be announced by a star, that messengers from distant peoples would come at his birth to render him homage and bring him gifts. It was supposed that this prophecy was accomplished by so-called Chaldæan astrologers said to have come about that time to Jerusalem. On other occasions they attributed to him relations, from his very cradle, with celebrated men, such as John the Baptist, Herod the Great, and two aged persons, Simeon and Anna, who had left memories of great sanctity. A somewhat loose chronology characterised these combinations, which, for the most part, were founded on real facts in a travestied form. But a singular spirit of gentleness and goodness, a profoundly popular feeling informed all these fables, and made them supplemental to his teaching. It was especially after

the death of Jesus that such narratives became elaborately developed; it may be supposed however that they were already in circulation during his lifetime, and met with nothing but pious credulity and simple admiration.

That Jesus ever dreamed of making himself pass for an incarnation of God is a matter about which no doubt can exist. Such an idea was entirely foreign to the Jewish mind; there is no trace of it in the synoptic Gospels, and we only find it indicated in certain portions of the fourth Gospel, which can least be accepted as echoing the thoughts of Jesus. At times Jesus even seems to take precautions to controvert such a doctrine. The accusation that he made himself God, or the equal of God, is presented, even in the fourth Gospel, as a Jewish calumny. In this last Gospel he declares himself to be less than his Father. Elsewhere he avows that the Father has not revealed all to him. He believes himself to be more than an ordinary man, but separated by an infinite distance from God. He is the Son of God, but all men are, or may become so in divers degrees. Every man, day by day, should call God his Father; all who are raised again will be Sons of God. Divine sonship was, in the Old Testament, attributed to human beings without equality with God being also attributed to them. The word "son" has the widest meanings in the Semitic language and in that of the New Testament. And besides, the idea of man held by Jesus does not conform to the moderate estimate which has been introduced by a cold deism. In his poetic conception of nature one breath alone suspires through the universe; the breath of man is that of God; God dwells in man, and lives by man, even as man dwells in God, and lives by God. The transcendental idealism of Jesus never permitted



him a very clear impression of his own personality. He is his Father, his Father is he. He lives in his disciples; everywhere he is with them; his disciples are one even as he and his Father are one. The idea to him is everything; the body, which makes distinctions of persons, is naught.

The designation "Son of God," or simply "Son," thus became for Jesus a term analogous to "Son of man," and, like that, synonymous with the "Messiah," the only difference being that he called himself "Son of man," and does not appear to have made the same use of the title, "Son of God." "Son of man" expressed his character as judge, "Son of God" his participation in the heavenly government and his power. This power has no limits. His Father has given him all power. He has a right to alter even the Sabbath. None can know the Father save through him; and to him the Father has granted the right to judge. Nature obeys him; but she also obeys all who believe and pray, for faith can do all things. It must be remembered that no conception of natural laws entered either his mind or those of his hearers to mark the bounds of the impossible. Those who witnessed his miracles glorified God "which had given such power unto men."<sup>1</sup> He granted remission of sins; he was greater than David and Abraham, and Solomon, and the prophets. We do not know in what form, or to what extent, these affirmations of himself were made. Jesus is not to be judged by the law of our petty conventionalities. His disciples' admiration overwhelmed him and carried him away. It is evident that the title of "Rabbi," with which he was at first contented, no longer sufficed him; even the title of prophet or messenger of God corresponded no longer with

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ix. 8.

his ideas. The position he attributed to himself was that of a superhuman being, and he wished to be regarded as possessing a higher relationship with God than other men. But it is to be remarked that the words "superhuman" and "supernatural," borrowed from our petty theology, were meaningless in the lofty religious consciousness of Jesus. To him nature and human development were not limited kingdoms external to God—paltry realities subject to laws of hopeless rigour. There was no supernature for him, because there was no nature. Intoxicated with infinite love, he forgot the heavy chain which binds the spirit captive; at one bound he cleared the abyss, impassable to the many, which the weakness of human faculties has made between man and God.

In these affirmations of Jesus we cannot but discover the germ of the doctrine which was later to make him a divine hypostasis, by identifying him with the "Word," or "second God," or "eldest Son of God," or the "Angel Metathronos," which Jewish theology had created from another point of view. In a measure Jewish theology was compelled to soften the extreme rigour of the older monotheism, by placing beside God an assessor to whom the eternal Father was supposed to delegate the government of the universe. The belief that certain men were incarnations of divine faculties or "powers" began to spread. About the same period the Samaritans possessed a thaumaturgist whom they identified with the "great power of God."<sup>1</sup> For nearly two centuries the speculative minds of Judaism had yielded to a tendency to personify specifically the divine attributes and certain expressions relating to the Deity. Thus the "Breath of God," to which frequent reference

<sup>1</sup> Acts viii. 10.

is made in the Old Testament, came to be considered a being apart—the Holy Spirit. In like manner the “Wisdom of God” and the “Word of God” became distinct personalities. This was the germ of the process from which have sprung the *Sephiroth* of the Cabbala, the *Æons* of Gnosticism, the Christian hypostases, and all the barren mythology, consisting of personified abstractions, to which monotheism must have recourse when it desires to pluralise God.

Jesus apparently remained a stranger to these theological subtleties, which were soon to fill the world with sterile disputations. Of the metaphysical theory of the Word, as it is to be found in the writings of his contemporary, Philo, in the Chaldean *Targummim*, and, even at this date, in the Book of Wisdom, no glimpse can be caught either in the *Logia* of Matthew, or in general in the Synoptics, the authentic interpreters of the words of Jesus. The doctrine of the Word in fact had nothing in common with Messianism. The Word of Philo and the *Targummim* is in no sense the Messiah. It was in later times that Jesus was identified with the Word, and that an entire new theology, very different from that of the kingdom of God, was created. The essential character of the Word is that of creator and of providence; but Jesus never professed to have created the world or to govern it. His office was to be its judge and to regenerate it. The position of presiding judge at the final assizes of mankind was that which Jesus assigned to himself, and the character which all the first Christians attributed to him. Until the great day he was to sit at the right hand of God, as his *Metathronos*, his prime minister, and his future avenger. The superhuman Christ of the Byzantine *Absides*, seated as judge of the world, in the

midst of apostles of the same rank as himself, and higher than the angels, who only stand by and serve,—such is the exact pictorial rendering of that conception of the Son of man, the principal features of which we find so strongly indicated even in the Book of Daniel.

At all events the strictness of a studied scholastic theology had no existence in such a state of society. The whole group of ideas which we have just noted formed, in the minds of the disciples, a theological system so little settled that, according to them, the Son of God, who is a kind of divine double, acts purely as man. He is tempted, he is ignorant of many things, he disciplines himself, he is cast down and discouraged, he is submissive as a son to God. He who is to judge the world knows not the day of judgment. He takes precautions for his safety. Soon after his birth, it is found necessary to conceal him from powerful men who desire to slay him. In exorcisms, the devil cheats him, and does not come forth at the first command. In his miracles, we are sensible of painful effort—of exhaustion, as though something went out of him. All these are simply the deeds of a messenger of God, of a man protected and favoured by God. Neither logic nor sequence are to be sought here. The need which Jesus had of gaining reputation, and the enthusiasm of his disciples, caused contradictory notions to accumulate. To men specially filled with hopes of the coming of the Messiah, and to ardent readers of the books of Daniel and Enoch, he was the Son of man; to Jews holding the ordinary faith and to readers of Isaiah and Micah, he was the Son of David; to his disciples, he was the Son of God, or simply the Son. Others, without thereby incurring the reproach of the disciples, took him for John the Baptist risen from the

dead, for Elias, or for Jeremiah, in conformity with the popular belief that the ancient prophets were about to reappear, in order to make ready for the time of the Messiah.

Absolute conviction, or rather an enthusiasm which shielded him from even the possibility of doubt, covered all these audacities. With our cold and hesitant natures, we little understand how any one can be thus possessed by the idea of which he has made himself the apostle. To us, members of deeply serious races, conviction means sincerity to one's self. But sincerity to one's self has not much meaning for Oriental peoples, little accustomed as they are to the subtleties of the critical spirit. Good faith and imposture are words which, in our rigid consciences, are opposed as two irreconcilable terms. In the East there are numberless ingenious loopholes of escape and circuitous paths from one to the other. Even highly exalted men, like the authors of apocryphal books, Daniel, for instance, and Enoch, committed, to aid their cause, and without the shadow of a scruple, acts which we should call frauds. Literal truth is of very little value to the Oriental; he sees everything through the medium of his ideas, his interests, and his passions.

History is impossible unless we frankly admit that there are many standards of sincerity. Faith knows no other law than the interests of what it holds to be the truth. The end pursued being for it absolutely sacred, it makes no scruple of employing faulty arguments to prove its thesis when good arguments are unsuccessful. If such and such a proof be not valid, how many others are! . . . If such and such a miracle never occurred, how many others did occur! . . . How many pious men, convinced of the truth of their

religion, have sought to triumph over the stubbornness of their fellows by the use of means the weakness of which was apparent to themselves! How many stigmatists, epileptics, and convent visionaries have been compelled, by the influence of their environment and by their own belief, to acts of deception, either for the purpose of keeping abreast of others or to support a cause in peril! All great things are done through the people; we can lead the people only by adapting ourselves to its ideas. The philosopher who, knowing this, isolates and fortifies himself in his integrity deserves high praise. But he who accepts humanity with its illusions, and seeks to act with it and upon it, cannot be reproached. Cæsar knew very well that he was not the son of Venus; France would not be what she is, had she not for a thousand years believed in the Holy Ampulla of Rheims. It is easy for us, feeble as we are, to call this falsehood, and, proud of our timid honesty, to heap abuse on the heroes who have accepted the battle of life under other conditions. When we have accomplished by our scruples what they accomplished by their falsehoods, we shall have a right to be severe on them. At least we must make a marked distinction between societies like our own, where all takes place in the full light of reflection, and simple and credulous communities, in which the beliefs that have governed the ages have been born. Nothing great has been founded that is not built upon a legend. In such cases the only culprit is mankind, which is willing to be deceived.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## MIRACLES.

Two means of proof—miracles and the accomplishment of prophecies—could alone establish a supernatural mission in the opinion of the contemporaries of Jesus. He himself, but more especially his disciples, employed these two methods of demonstration in perfect good faith. For a long time Jesus had been convinced that the prophets had only written with reference to himself. He recognised himself in their sacred oracles. He regarded himself as the mirror in which the whole prophetic spirit of Israel had read the future. The Christian school, perhaps even during the lifetime of its founder, sought to prove that Jesus corresponded perfectly with all that the prophets had foretold of the Messiah. In many cases these similarities were superficial, and for us scarcely appreciable. Most frequently they were fortuitous or insignificant circumstances in the Master's life which recalled to the disciples certain passages in the Psalms and the Prophets, in which, by reason of their constant preoccupation, they saw images of what was passing before their eyes. The exegesis of the period thus consisted almost entirely in juggling with words, and in quotations made in an artificial and arbitrary manner. The synagogue had no fixed official list of passages

relating to the future reign. Messianic references could be easily created, and consisted rather in artifices of style than in serious reasoning.

As to miracles, they were considered at this epoch the indispensable mark of the divine, and the sign of the prophetic vocation. The legends of Elijah and Elisha abounded in them. It was commonly believed that the Messiah would perform many. At Samaria, a few miles from where Jesus was staying, a magician called Simon acquired an almost divine reputation by his wonders. Later, when attempts were made to establish the fame of Apollonius of Tyana, and to prove that his life had been the sojourn of a god upon earth, success was deemed possible only by the invention of a vast cycle of miracles. The Alexandrian philosophers themselves, Plotinus and others, were reputed to have performed several. Jesus was therefore compelled to choose between two alternatives—either to renounce his mission, or to become a thaumaturgist. It must be remembered that the whole ancient world, with the exception of the great scientific schools of Greece and their Roman disciples, accepted miracles; and that Jesus not only believed in them, but had not the least idea of an order of nature under the reign of law. On this point his knowledge was in no way superior to that of his contemporaries. Indeed, one of his most deeply-rooted opinions was that by faith and prayer man had entire power over nature. The faculty of working miracles was regarded as a privilege frequently conferred upon men by God, and as having nothing surprising in it.

Time has changed that which constituted the power of the great founder of Christianity into something offensive to our ideas; and if ever the worship of Jesus loses its hold



on mankind, it will be precisely on account of those acts which originally made people believe in him. Criticism experiences no embarrassment before historical phenomena of this order. A thaumaturgist of our own day, unless he be of an extreme simplicity, like that shown by certain German stigmatists, is objectionable; for he performs miracles without believing in them; he is a mere charlatan. But if we take a Francis of Assisi, the question becomes altogether different; the cycle of miracles connected with the origin of the Franciscan order, far from giving offence, affords us real pleasure. The founders of Christianity lived in a state of poetic ignorance as complete as that of St. Clare and the *tres socii*. They thought it perfectly natural that their Master should have interviews with Moses and Elias, that he should command the elements, that he should heal the sick. It must also be remembered that every idea loses somewhat of its purity, as soon as it aspires to realisation. Success is never attained without delicacy of soul suffering some injury. Such is the weakness of the human mind that the best causes are usually won by bad reasoning. The demonstrations of the primitive Christian apologists rest on very poor arguments. Moses, Christopher Columbus, and Mahomet triumphed over obstacles only by constantly taking men's weakness into account, and by sometimes withholding the genuine reasons for the truth. It is probable that the hearers of Jesus were more impressed by his miracles than by his preaching, profoundly divine as it was. It must be added that popular rumour, both before and after the death of Jesus, no doubt enormously exaggerated the number of occurrences of this kind. The types of Gospel miracles in fact present little variety; they repeat each other and seemed fashioned from a

very small number of models, suited to the taste of the country.

Amongst the miraculous narratives tediously enumerated in the Gospels, it is impossible to distinguish the miracles attributed to Jesus, either during his lifetime or after his death, from those in which he consented to play an active part. Above all it is impossible to ascertain whether their offensive characteristics—the groaning, struggling, and features savouring of jugglery—are really historical, or whether they are fruits of the belief of the compilers, strongly imbued with theurgy, and, in this respect, living in a world similar to that of the “spiritualists” of our own days. It was a popular belief indeed that the divine virtue in man was epileptic and convulsive in character. Almost all the miracles that Jesus believed he performed seem to have been miracles of healing. Medicine was at that period in Judæa what it still remains in the East, that is to say, quite unscientific and absolutely given over to individual inspiration. Scientific medicine, founded by Greece five centuries before, was at the time of Jesus unknown to the Jews of Palestine. In such a state of knowledge the presence of a man greater than average men, treating the patient with gentleness, and giving him, by tangible signs, assurance of his recovery, is frequently a decisive remedy. Who would dare to assert that in many cases, certain injuries always excepted, the touch of a gentle and beautiful woman is not worth all the resources of pharmacy? Cure is effected by the mere pleasure of seeing her. She gives what she can, a smile, a hope, and it is not in vain.

Jesus had no more conception than his compatriots of a rational medical science; like almost every one else, he believed that healing was to be effected by religious practices,

and such a belief was perfectly consistent. From the moment that disease was regarded as a punishment for sin, or the act of a demon, and by no means as the result of physical causes, the best physician was the holy man possessed of power in the supernatural world. Healing was considered a moral act; and Jesus, who felt the moral power within him, believed himself specially gifted to heal. Convinced that the touching of his robe, the laying on of his hands, or the application of his saliva did good to the sick, he would have been harsh indeed had he refused to those that suffered a solace which it was in his power to bestow. Healing the sick was regarded as one of the signs of the kingdom of God, and was always associated with the emancipation of the poor. Both were signs of the mighty revolution which was to culminate in the redress of all infirmities. The Essenes, who have so many bonds of relationship with Jesus, also had the reputation of being very potent spiritual physicians.

One of the kinds of healing which Jesus most often practised was exorcism, or the expulsion of demons. A strange disposition to believe in demons pervaded all minds. It was a universal opinion, not only in Judæa, but throughout the whole world, that demons seized upon the bodies of certain people and made them act against their own will. A Persian *Div*, mentioned several times in the Avesta, *Aeschma-daëva*, the "*Div* of concupiscence," adopted by the Jews under the name of *Asmodeus*, came to be considered the cause of all hysterical maladies in women. Epilepsy, mental and nervous diseases, in which the patient seems no longer to belong to himself, and infirmities the cause of which is not outwardly apparent, like deafness and dumbness, were explained in the same fashion. The admir-

able treatise, "On Sacred Disease," by Hippocrates, which had set forth the true principles of medicine on this subject, four centuries and a half before Jesus, had not banished so great an error from the world. It was believed that there were more or less efficacious means of driving away the demons; and the occupation of the exorcist was a regular profession like that of the physician. There can be no doubt that Jesus had in his lifetime the reputation of possessing the greatest secrets of the art. At that time there were many lunatics in Judæa, doubtless in consequence of the general mental excitement. These mad folk, who were allowed to wander about at large, as they are still in the same regions, dwelt in the abandoned sepulchral caves which were the usual resorts of vagrants. Jesus had great influence over these unhappy beings. A thousand singular incidents were told concerning his cures, in which all the credulity of the time found full scope. But here again the difficulties need not be exaggerated. The disorders that were explained by "possessions" were often very slight. At the present day in Syria people who are only somewhat eccentric are looked upon as mad or possessed by a demon, these two ideas being expressed by the same word—*medjnoun*. In such cases a gentle word often suffices to expel the demon. Such, no doubt, was the method used by Jesus. Who knows whether his fame as an exorcist were not spread almost without his own knowledge? Residents in the East are occasionally surprised to find themselves, after some time, enjoying a great reputation as doctors, sorcerers, or discoverers of treasures, without being able to account to themselves for the facts which have given rise to these fancies.

Many circumstances moreover seem to indicate that

Jesus only became a thaumaturgist late in life and against his own inclinations. Frequently he works his miracles with reluctance, only after he has been besought to do so, reproaching those who ask for them with grossness of mind. One particular point, apparently inexplicable, is the care which he takes to work his miracles in secret, and his request, addressed to those whom he heals, to tell no one. When the demons wish to hail him as Son of God, he forbids them to open their mouths; it is in spite of himself that they recognise him. These features are especially to be noted in Mark, who is pre-eminently the evangelist of miracles and exorcisms. It seems as though the disciple who furnished the fundamental teachings of this Gospel used to importune Jesus with his admiration for wonders, and, as though the Master, weary of a reputation which weighed upon him, had often said, "See thou say nothing to any man." On one occasion this discordance in views led to a singular outburst, a fit of impatience, in which the annoyance these perpetual demands of weak minds caused Jesus, broke forth. At times one might imagine that the position of thaumaturgist was distasteful to him, and that he tried to give as little publicity as possible to the wonders which, in a manner, grew beneath his feet. When his enemies asked a miracle of him, especially a celestial miracle, a "sign from heaven," he persistently refused. We may therefore be permitted to believe that his reputation as a thaumaturgist was imposed upon him, that he did not resist it much, but that, at the same time, he did nothing to encourage it, and that, at all events, he felt the vanity of popular opinion in the matter.

It would show lack of a good historical method to attach over-much importance to our personal prejudices on this

point. The essential condition of true criticism is to understand the great diversity of view between different ages, and to free one's self from the instinctive habits due to a purely rational education. To avoid the objections which might be raised against the character of Jesus, we ought not to suppress facts which, in the eyes of his contemporaries, were of the highest importance. It would be easy to say that these are the additions of disciples far inferior to their Master, who, being unable to appreciate his true grandeur, have sought to magnify him by feats of illusion unworthy of him. But the four narrators of the life of Jesus are unanimous in extolling his miracles; one of them, Mark, the interpreter of the apostle Peter, insists so strongly on this point, that, were we to trace the character of Christ from his Gospel exclusively, we should represent him as an exorcist in possession of charms of rare efficacy, as a very powerful and awe-inspiring sorcerer such as people prefer to avoid. We will admit then, without hesitation, that acts which would now be considered characteristic of illusion or madness occupied a large place in the life of Jesus. Is the sublime aspect of such a life to be sacrificed to these uninviting features? By no means. A mere sorcerer would not have brought about a moral revolution like that effected by Jesus. If the thaumaturgist had in Jesus effaced the moralist and the religious reformer, he would have been the founder, not of Christianity, but of a school of theurgy.

The problem, moreover, similarly presents itself in the case of all saints and religious founders. Things now considered morbid, such as epilepsy and hallucinations, were formerly marks of power and greatness. Physicians

have a name for the disease which made the fortune of Mahomet.<sup>1</sup> Almost in our own days the men who have done most for their kind (the excellent Vincent de Paul himself!) were, whether they desired it or not, thaumaturgists. If we proceed from the principle that every historical person to whom have been attributed acts which we in the nineteenth century hold to be irrational or suggestive of quackery, was either a madman or a charlatan, all criticism is nullified. The school of Alexandria was a noble school, yet nevertheless it gave itself up to the practice of an extravagant theurgy. Socrates and Pascal were not exempt from hallucinations. Facts must be explained by proportionate causes. Weak points in the human mind only engender weakness; great things always have great causes in man's nature, although they are often developed amidst a number of petty features which, to superficial minds, eclipse their grandeur.

In a general sense therefore it may be truly said that Jesus was only a thaumaturgist and exorcist in spite of himself. As always happens in great and divine careers, he accepted miracles exacted by public opinion rather than performed them. Miracles are usually the work of the public, and not of him to whom they are attributed. Jesus persistently refused to work miracles which the multitude would have created for him; the greatest miracle would have been his refusal to perform any; never would the laws of history and popular psychology have suffered a greater derogation. He was no more free than St. Bernard or St. Francis of Assisi to moderate the thirst of the multitude and his disciples for the marvellous. The miracles of Jesus were a violence done him by his age, a concession forced

<sup>1</sup> *Hysteria Muscularis* of Schœnlein.

from him by passing necessity. Exorcist and thaumaturgus have alike fallen from their high place; but the religious reformer will live eternally.

Even those who did not believe in him were impressed by these acts and sought to witness them. The pagans and people unacquainted with him had a feeling of dread, and would fain have driven him out of their district. Many thought perhaps of bringing his name into ill repute by connecting it with seditious movements. But the purely moral tendency of the character of Jesus and his aloofness from politics saved him from such entanglements. His kingdom was in the circle of child-like men, whom the same freshness of imagination, the same foretaste of heaven, had grouped and kept steadfast around him.



## CHAPTER XVII.

THE FINAL FORM OF THE IDEAS OF JESUS REGARDING  
THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

WE suppose that this last phase of the activity of Jesus lasted for about eighteen months, from the time of his return from the Passover of the year 31 until his journey to the feast of Tabernacles in the year 32. During this period the conceptions of Jesus were not enriched by the addition of any new element; but all that was already within him grew and developed with an ever-increasing degree of power and audacity.

The fundamental idea of Jesus from his earliest days was the establishment of the kingdom of God. But this kingdom of God, as we have already said, appears to have been understood by Jesus in very diverse senses. At times he might be taken for a democratic leader, desiring nothing more than the triumph of the poor and the outcast. At other times, the kingdom of God is the literal consummation of apocalyptic visions relating to the Messiah. Lastly, the kingdom of God is often the spiritual kingdom, and the deliverance at hand is a deliverance of the soul. The revolution desired by Jesus in this last sense is the one which has really taken place, the foundation of a new worship, purer than that of Moses. All these thoughts

appear to have existed simultaneously in the mind of Jesus. The first however—that of a temporal revolution—does not appear to have impressed him greatly. He never considered the earth, or the riches of the earth, or material power, as being worth any thought; he had no worldly ambition. At times, as a natural consequence, his great religious importance was in danger of being transformed into a social importance. Men came asking him to act as judge and arbitrator in questions affecting their material interests. Jesus haughtily rejected such proposals, treating them almost as insults. Thinking only of his heavenly ideal, he never abandoned his disdainful poverty. As to the other two conceptions of the kingdom of God, Jesus always appears to have held them simultaneously. Had he been only an enthusiast, led astray by the apocalypses on which popular imagination was nourished, he would have remained an obscure sectary, inferior to those whose ideas he followed. Had he only been a puritan, a sort of Channing or “Savoyard vicar,” he would undoubtedly have had no success. The two parts of his system, or rather his two conceptions of the kingdom of God, lean on each other; and this mutual support has been the cause of his incomparable success. The earliest Christians were dreamers, moving in a circle of ideas which we should call visionary; but, at the same time, they were the heroes of that social war which culminated in the enfranchisement of the conscience and in the establishment of a religion from which the pure worship proclaimed by the founder will finally proceed.

The apocalyptic ideas of Jesus in their completest form may be thus summed up. The actual state of mankind is nearing its end. This end will be an immense revolution, “an anguish” like the pains of child-birth, a *palingenesis*, or,

in the words of Jesus himself, a "new birth," preceded by dark calamities and heralded by strange phenomena. On the great day the sign of the Son of man will shine forth in the heavens; it will be a startling and luminous vision like that of Sinai, a mighty storm rending the clouds, a fiery meteor flashing in the twinkling of an eye from east to west. The Messiah will appear in the clouds, clad in glory and majesty, to the sound of trumpets, and surrounded by angels. His disciples will be seated on thrones beside him. Then the dead will rise and the Messiah proceed to judgment.

At this judgment men will be divided into two classes according to their works, and the angels will execute the sentences. The elect will enter into a delightful place of sojourn which has been prepared for them from the beginning of the world; there they will be seated, clothed with light, at a feast presided over by Abraham, the patriarchs, and the prophets. They will be the smaller number. The rest will depart into *Gehenna*. *Gehenna* was the valley to the west of Jerusalem. There, at various times, the worship of fire had been practised, and the place had become a sort of sewer. *Gehenna*, therefore, in the ideas of Jesus, was a gloomy, filthy valley, a subterranean gulf full of fire. Those excluded from the kingdom shall there be burnt and devoured by the undying worm, in the company of Satan and his rebel angels. There shall there be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The kingdom of heaven will be as a closed room, lighted from within, in the midst of a world of darkness and torments.

This new order of things will be eternal. Paradise and *Gehenna* will be without end. An impassable abyss divides one from the other. The Son of man, seated at the right

hand of God, will rule over this final condition of the world and mankind.

That all this was taken literally by the disciples, and, at certain moments by the Master himself, appears absolutely clear from the writings of the time. If the first Christian generation possessed one profound and constant belief, it was that the end of the world was near, and that the great "revelation" of Christ was about to take place. The startling proclamation, "The time is at hand,"<sup>1</sup> which opens and closes the Apocalypse; the incessantly reiterated appeal, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!"<sup>2</sup> were rallying cries of hope for the whole apostolic age. A Syrian expression, *Maran atha*,<sup>3</sup> "Our Lord cometh!" became a sort of password, which believers employed amongst themselves to strengthen their faith and hopes. The Apocalypse, written in the year 68 of our era, declares that the end will come in three years and a half, and the "Ascension of Isaiah" adopts a closely similar calculation.

Jesus never indulged in such precision of detail. When he was questioned as to the time of his advent, he always refused to reply; indeed, he declared that the date of the great day was known only by the Father, who had revealed it neither to the angels nor to the Son. He said that the time when the kingdom of God was most anxiously expected was just that at which it would not appear. He constantly repeated that his coming would be a surprise, as in the days of Noah and of Lot; that we must be on our guard, always ready to set out; that each one must watch and keep his lamp trimmed

<sup>1</sup> Revelations i. 3, xxii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 15, xiii. 9, 43; Mark iv. 9, 23, vii. 16; Luke viii. 8, xiv. 35; Revelations ii. 7, 11, 27, 29, iii. 6, 13, 22, xiii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. xvi. 22.

as for a wedding procession, which arrives unexpectedly; that the Son of man would come like a thief, at an hour when men would not expect him; that he would appear as a great flash of light, running from one end of the heavens to the other. But his declarations on the proximity of the catastrophe leave no room for any equivocation. "This generation," he says, "shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished."<sup>1</sup> ". . . There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God."<sup>2</sup> He reproaches those who do not believe in him, for not being able to read the signs of the kingdom to come. "When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the heaven is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day; for the sky is red and lowering. Ye know how to discern the face of the heaven; but ye cannot discern the signs of the times."<sup>3</sup> By an illusion common to all great reformers, Jesus imagined the end to be much nearer than it actually was; he did not take into account the sluggishness of human movements; he thought to realise in a single day that which, eighteen centuries later, has still to be achieved.

These formal declarations absorbed the minds of the Christian family for nearly seventy years. It was believed that some of the disciples would behold the day of final revelation without dying. John especially was reputed to be of this number; many believed that he would never die. Perhaps this was a later opinion caused, towards the close of the first century, by the advanced age which John seems to have reached—this age having given rise to the belief that God wished to prolong his life indefinitely until the great day, so as to realise the words of Jesus. When he

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxi. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Luke ix. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xvi. 2-4.

in his turn died, the faith of many was shaken, and his disciples attached to the prediction of Christ a less pronounced meaning.

While Jesus fully admitted the apocalyptic beliefs, as they are to be found in the apocryphal Jewish books, he admitted the doctrine, which is the complement, or rather the condition of them all—namely, the resurrection of the dead. This doctrine, as we have already remarked, was still somewhat new in Israel; many people either did not know it or did not believe it. It was an article of faith to the Pharisees and the fervent adherents of Messianic beliefs. Jesus accepted it unreservedly, but always in its most idealistic sense. Many imagined that in the resuscitated world they would eat, drink, and marry. Jesus indeed admits a new Passover, a table, and a new wine into his kingdom; but he expressly excludes marriage from it. On this subject the Sadducees had an argument, coarse in appearance, but one which really conformed with the old theology. It will be remembered that, according to the ancient sages, a man survived only in his children. The Mosaic code had consecrated this patriarchal theory by a curious institution—the levirate law. From this the Sadducees drew subtle deductions against the resurrection. Jesus escaped them by the formal declaration that in the life eternal, differences of sex would no longer exist, and that men would be like the angels. Sometimes he seems to promise resurrection only to the righteous, the punishment of the wicked consisting in complete death and annihilation. Oftener, however, Jesus declares that the resurrection will bring eternal confusion to the wicked.

It will be seen that in all these theories there was nothing absolutely new. The Gospels and the apostolic writings

scarcely contain anything as regards apocalyptic doctrines save what might be found already in "Daniel," "Enoch," the "Sibylline Oracles," and the "Assumption of Moses," which are books of Jewish origin. Jesus accepted these ideas, which were generally diffused among his contemporaries. He made them his basis of action, or rather one of his bases; for he had too profound an idea of his true work to establish it solely upon such fragile principles—principles so liable to receive the crushing refutation of actual facts.

It is indeed evident that such a doctrine, taken by itself in a literal fashion, could have no future. The world falsified it by continuing to exist. One generation at the most was the limit of its endurance. The faith of the first Christian generation is intelligible, but the faith of the second generation is no longer so. After the death of John, or of the last survivor, whoever he might be, of the group which had seen the Master, the words of Jesus were convicted of falsity. Had the doctrine of Jesus been simply belief in an approaching end of the world, it would certainly be now sleeping in oblivion. What then has saved it? The great breadth of Gospel conceptions, which has permitted ideas suited to very diverse intellectual conditions to be found under the same symbol. The world has not ended, as Jesus announced, and as his disciples believed it would end. But it has been renewed, and in one sense renewed as Jesus desired. It is because his thought was two-sided that it has been fruitful. His dreams have not suffered the fate of so many others which have crossed the human mind, because they concealed a germ of life which, having been introduced, thanks to a coating of fable, into the bosom of humanity, has thus borne eternal fruits.

And let it not be said that this is a benevolent interpretation, imagined in order to clear the honour of our great Master from the cruel contradiction inflicted on his dreams by reality. No, indeed; this true kingdom of God, this kingdom of the spirit, which makes of each man both king and priest; this kingdom which, like the grain of mustard-seed, has become a tree which shades the world, and amidst the branches of which the birds have their nests, was understood, desired, and founded by Jesus. By the side of the false, cold, impossible idea of an ostentatious advent, he conceived the real city of God, the true "palin-genesis," the Sermon on the Mount, the raising up of the weak, the love of the people, esteem for the poor, and the restoration of all that is humble, and true, and simple. This restoration he has depicted as an incomparable artist, in touches which will last for eternity. Each one of us owes that which is best in himself to him. Let us forgive him his hopes of a vain apocalypse, and of a great triumphal coming upon the clouds of heaven. Perhaps these were the errors of others rather than his own; and if it be true that he himself shared the general illusion, what matter, since his dream made him strong in the face of death, and sustained him in a strife for which otherwise he might have been unequal?

We must then attach several meanings to the divine city conceived by Jesus. Had his only thought been that the end of time was at hand, and that we must make ready for it, he would not have surpassed John the Baptist. To renounce a world on the point of crumbling away, to detach one's self little by little from the present life, and to aspire to the kingdom about to come, would have been the one point in his preaching. The teaching of Jesus had always a



much wider bearing. He proposed to create a new state of humanity, and not merely to prepare the end of that actually existent. Had Elias or Jeremiah come to earth again to prepare men for the supreme crisis, they would not have preached as he did. This is so true, that the morality, attributed to his latter days, has been found to be the eternal morality, that which has saved mankind. Jesus himself in many cases employs fashions of speech which do not accord in the least with the apocalyptic theory. He often declares that the kingdom of God has already begun; that every man bears it within himself, and, if he be worthy, can partake of it; that each one silently creates this kingdom by true conversion of heart. The kingdom of God is then only righteousness, a better order of things than that which exists, the reign of justice which the faithful, according to their powers, ought to help in founding; or, again, freedom of soul, something analogous to the Buddhist "deliverance," the fruit of the soul's separation from matter. These truths, which to us are purely abstract, were living realities to Jesus. Everything in his mind was concrete and substantial. Jesus was the man of all men who most thoroughly believed in the reality of the ideal.

Even though accepting the Utopias of his time and his race, Jesus was thus able to make lofty truths of them, thanks to fruitful misconceptions of their import. His kingdom of God was doubtless the apocalypse, which was soon to be unfolded in the heavens. But besides this, and probably above all, it was the soul's kingdom, founded on freedom, and on the feeling of sonship which the good man knows in his rest on the bosom of his Father. It was a pure religion without forms, without temple, and without priest; it was the moral judgment of the world delegated

to the conscience of the righteous man and to the arm of the people. This is what was destined to live; this is what has lived. When, at the close of a century of vain expectation, the materialistic hope of an approaching end of the world was worn out, the true kingdom of God came to light. Convenient explanations threw a veil over the material kingdom, which made no haste to appear. Men of obstinate mind, who, like Papias, adhered to the literal truth of the words of Jesus, were considered narrow-minded and behind the age. The Apocalypse of John, the first canonical book of the New Testament, being too formally attached to the idea of an immediate catastrophe, became of secondary importance, was regarded as unintelligible, tortured in a thousand ways, and almost rejected; at least its accomplishment was adjourned to an indefinite future. Some poor benighted beings, who, in a fully enlightened age, still clung to the hopes of the first disciples, became heretics (Ebionites, Millenarians), lost in the shallows of Christianity. Mankind had passed on to another kingdom of God. The element of truth contained in the thought of Jesus had prevailed over the chimera which obscured it.

Let us not, however, despise this chimera, which has been the coarse rind of the sacred fruit on which we live. This fantastic kingdom of heaven, this endless pursuit after a city of God, which has been the constant and absorbing idea of Christianity during its long career, has been the principle of that great instinct of futurity which has filled the souls of all reformers, persistent believers in the Apocalypse, from Joachim of Flora, down to the Protestant sectary of our own days. This impotent effort to found a perfect state of society has been the source of the

extraordinary tension which has always made the true Christian an athlete at strife with his own epoch. The idea of the "kingdom of God," and the Apocalypse, which forms its complete image, are thus, in a sense, the loftiest and most poetic expression of human progress. But of necessity they also gave rise to great errors. The end of the world, hanging as a constant menace over mankind, hampered all secular development by the periodical panics which it caused during centuries. Society, being no longer certain of its own existence, contracted therefrom a kind of trepidation and those habits of servile humility which rendered the Middle Ages so inferior both to ancient and modern times. A profound change also took place in the manner of regarding the coming of Christ. When it was first announced to mankind that the end of its planet was at hand, like the infant which welcomes death with a smile, it had the intensest increase of joy that it has ever felt. But in growing old the world became attached to life. The day of grace, so long awaited by the simple souls of Galilee, became to the iron mediæval ages a day of wrath: *Dies iræ, dies illa!* But, in the very midst of barbarism, the idea of the kingdom of God continued to be fruitful. Some of the legal documents of the first half of the Middle Ages beginning with the formula, "On the coming of the evening of the world . . .," are charters of enfranchisement. In spite of the feudal Church, of sects, and of religious orders, holy men and women continued to protest in the name of the Gospel against the world's iniquity. Even in our own days, troublous days in which Jesus has no truer followers than those who seem to deny him, the dreams of an ideal organisation of society, which have so much analogy to the aspirations of the primitive Christian

sects, are in one sense nothing but the blossoming of the same idea, one of the branches of that mighty tree in which germinates all thought of futurity, of which the "kingdom of God" will be eternally the root and the stem. On this phrase all the social revolutions of humanity will be grafted. But, tainted by a gross materialism, and aspiring to the impossible—that is to say, to the foundation of universal happiness upon political and economic measures, the socialistic endeavours of our time will remain unfruitful, until they take as their guiding principle the true spirit of Jesus, by which I mean absolute idealism—the principle that to possess the world we must renounce it.

The phrase, "kingdom of God," also expresses with singular felicity the want felt by the soul of a supplementary destiny, of a compensation for actual life. Those who cannot bring themselves to conceive of man as being a compound of two substances, and regard the deistic dogma of the immortality of the soul as being in contradiction with physiology, love to rest in the hope of a final reparation, which, under some unknown form, shall satisfy the needs of the heart of man. Who knows if the last term of progress after millions of ages may not evoke the absolute conscience of the universe, and in that conscience the awakening of all that has ever lived? The slumber of a million of years is no longer than the slumber of an hour. St. Paul, on this hypothesis, may have been right in saying, *In actu oculi!* It is certain that the moral and virtuous part of humanity will have its reward, that one day the ideas of the poor but honest man will judge the world, and that on that day the ideal figure of Jesus will bring confusion to the frivolous man who has not believed in virtue,

and to the selfish man who has been unable to attain to it. The favourite phrase of Jesus remains therefore full of an undying beauty. A kind of exalted divination seems to have maintained it in a vague sublimity simultaneously embracing diverse orders of truth.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE INSTITUTIONS OF JESUS.

THAT Jesus was never wholly absorbed in his apocalyptic ideas is proved moreover by the fact that, at the very time they were most in his thoughts, he laid with rare forethought the foundations of a Church that was destined to endure. It is scarcely possible to doubt that he himself chose from among his disciples those who received the special title of the "apostles," or the "twelve," since, on the day after his death, they are to be found forming a distinct body, and filling up by election the vacancies that happen in their midst. They were the two sons of Jonas, the two sons of Zebedee, James son of Alphaeus, Philip, Nathanael Bar-Tolmai, Thomas, Matthew, Simon Zelotes, Thaddeus or Lebbæus, and Judas of Kerioth. It is probable that the idea of the twelve tribes of Israel influenced the choice of this number. The "twelve," at all events, formed a group of privileged disciples, among whom Peter maintained a position of fraternal priority; and to them Jesus entrusted the propagation of his work. There was nothing, however, resembling a regularly organised sacerdotal body. The lists of the "twelve," which have been preserved, contain many uncertainties and contradictions; two or three of those who appear in them have remained completely obscure. At least two, Peter and Philip, were married and had children.

To the twelve Jesus evidently told secrets which he forbade them to communicate to the world. It seems as though his plan at times was to surround himself with a certain degree of mystery, to postpone the most important testimony concerning himself until after his death, and to reveal himself completely only to his disciples, confiding to them the care of showing him forth afterwards to the world. "What I tell you in the darkness, speak ye in the light; and what ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon the housetops."<sup>1</sup> This spared him the necessity of too precise statements and created a kind of medium between him and public opinion. It is clear that certain teachings were reserved for the apostles alone, and that he explained many parables to them, the meaning of which to the multitude was ambiguous. An enigmatical form and a certain strange fashion of associating ideas were usual in the teachings of the doctors, as may be seen in the sentences of the *Pirké Aboth*. To his intimate friends Jesus explained whatever was peculiar in his apothegms or in his apologues, and for them separated his meaning from the wealth of illustration which sometimes made it obscure. Many of these explanations appear to have been carefully preserved.

During the lifetime of Jesus the apostles preached, but without ever going far from him. Their preaching, moreover, was confined to the announcement of the speedy coming of the kingdom of God. They went from town to town, receiving hospitality, or rather taking it themselves, according to the custom of the land. In the East the guest has much authority; he is superior to the master of the house, who places the fullest confidence in him. Fire-side preaching like this is admirably adapted for spreading

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 27.

new doctrines. The hidden treasure is communicated, and thus payment is given for what has been received; politeness and good feeling lend their aid; the household is touched and converted. Without the factor of Eastern hospitality, an explanation of the propagation of Christianity would be impossible. Jesus, who greatly adhered to good old customs, encouraged his disciples to make no scruple of profiting by this ancient public right, probably abolished already in the great towns where there were inns. "The labourer," said he, "is worthy of his food."<sup>1</sup> Once installed in any man's house, they were to remain there, eating and drinking what was offered to them, so long as their mission lasted.

Jesus desired that, following his example, the messengers of the glad tidings should make their preaching pleasant by kindly and courteous manners. He directed that, on entering a house, they should give the salaam or greeting. Some hesitated, the salaam being then, as now in the East, a sign of religious communion, which is not hazarded with people of dubious faith. "Fear nothing," said Jesus; "if no one in the house is worthy of your salute, it will return unto you." Sometimes indeed the apostles of the kingdom of God were ill received, and came to complain to Jesus, who generally sought to soothe them. Some of them, convinced of the omnipotence of their Master, were hurt at this forbearance. The sons of Zebedee wished him to call down fire from heaven upon towns that were inhospitable. Jesus received their outbursts with his subtle irony, and made them cease by saying: "The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Luke ix. 56.



He sought in every way to lay down as a principle that his apostles were as himself. It was believed that he had endowed them with his own marvellous virtues. They cast out demons, prophesied, and formed a school of renowned exorcists, although certain cases were beyond their powers. They also wrought cures, either by the laying on of hands, or by anointing with oil, one of the fundamental practices of Oriental medicine. Lastly, like the Psylli, they could handle serpents and drink deadly potions with impunity. The farther we get from Jesus, the more offensive this theurgy becomes. But there is no doubt that it was generally used in the primitive Church, and that it greatly attracted the attention of the world around. Charlatans, as might be expected, took advantage of this movement of popular credulity. Even in the lifetime of Jesus, several, although not his disciples, cast out devils in his name. The real disciples were much annoyed at this, and sought to prevent them. Jesus, who regarded it as homage paid to his renown, was not very severe towards them. It must be observed, moreover, that the exercise of these supernatural powers had, if one can say so, become a trade. Carrying the logic of absurdity to extremes, certain men cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils. They imagined that this sovereign lord of the infernal regions must have full authority over his subordinates, and that, in acting through him, they were certain to put the intruding spirit to flight. Some even sought to purchase from the disciples of Jesus the secret of the miraculous powers which had been conferred upon them.

From this time the germ of a Church began to show itself. This fertile idea of the power of men bound together

in union (*ecclesia*) seems to have been derived from Jesus. Full of his purely idealistic doctrine that it is union by love that brings souls together, he declared that whenever a few men should gather together in his name, he would be in the midst of them. To the Church he confided the right to bind and to unbind (that is to say, to make certain things lawful or unlawful), to remit sins, to reprove, to give warning with authority, and to pray with the certainty of being favourably heard. It is possible that many of these words may have been attributed to the Master, so as to give a basis for the collective authority, the substitution of which for that of Jesus was afterwards sought. At all events, it was only after his death that particular churches were set up, and even this first constitution was made purely and simply on the model of the synagogue. Many people who had loved Jesus much, and had founded great hopes upon him, such as Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene, and Nicodemus, apparently did not join these churches, but clung to the tender or respectful memory of him which they had cherished.

In the teaching of Jesus, moreover, there is no trace of an applied ethics or of a canonical law, however slightly defined. Once only, on the question of marriage, he spoke decidedly and forbade divorce. Neither was there any theology or creed. There were views respecting the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, from which the Trinity and the Incarnation were afterwards deduced, but they were then only in a state of indeterminate imagery. The later books of the Jewish canon already recognised the Holy Spirit, a sort of divine hypostasis, sometimes identified with Wisdom or the Word. Jesus insisted on this point, and professed to give his disciples a baptism by fire and the spirit, far preferable to

that of John. To Jesus this Holy Spirit was identical with the breath for ever emanating from God the Father. Then subtleties began to appear in the doctrine. It was held that Jesus had promised his disciples to send, as a substitute after his death, a Spirit who should teach them all things and bear witness to the truths which he himself had promulgated. One day the apostles believed that they had received the baptism of this Spirit under the form of a mighty wind and tongues of fire. To designate the Spirit, use was made of the word Peraklit borrowed by Syro-Chaldaic from the Greek (*παράκλητος*), which appears to have had in this case the sense of "advocate," or "counsellor," or else that of "interpreter of heavenly truths," and "teacher charged with the revelation to men of mysteries still veiled." It is very doubtful whether Jesus employed the word. This was an application of the process which Jewish and Christian theologies were to follow during centuries, and which was to produce a whole series of divine assessors, the *Metathronos*, the *Synadelphie* or *Sandalphon*, and all the personifications of the Cabbala. But in Judaism these creations were to remain free personal speculations, whilst in Christianity, from the fourth century onwards, they were to form the very essence of orthodoxy and universal doctrine.

It is unnecessary to point out how remote from the ideas of Jesus was the idea of a religious book, containing a code and articles of faith. Not only did he not write, but it was contrary to the spirit of the infant sect to produce sacred books. Its members believed themselves on the eve of the great final catastrophe. The Messiah came to put his seal upon the Law and the Prophets, not to promulgate new Scriptures. And so, with the exception of the Apocalypse,

which in one sense was the only revealed book of primitive Christianity, all the other writings of the apostolic age were works occasioned by existing circumstances, making no pretensions to furnish a complete dogmatic whole. The Gospels had at first an entirely personal character, and possessed much less authority than tradition.

Had the sect, however, no sacrament, no rite, no rallying sign? It had one which all traditions ascribe to Jesus. One of the favourite ideas of the Master was that he was the new Bread of Life, bread far better than manna, on which mankind was to live. In speaking of this idea, the germ of the Eucharist, he at times gave it a singularly concrete form. On one occasion especially, in the synagogue of Capernaum, he allowed himself very free expression which cost him several of his disciples. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven." And he added, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."<sup>1</sup>

These words excited great murmuring. "The Jews therefore murmured concerning him because he said, I am the bread which came down out of heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how doth he now say, I am come down out of heaven?"<sup>2</sup> But Jesus, insisting with still more force, said, "I am the bread of life; your fathers did eat the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if any man eat of this

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 32 and following.

<sup>2</sup> John vi. 41, 42.

bread, he shall live for ever; yea, and the bread which I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”<sup>1</sup> The offence was now at its height: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus, going yet farther, said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have not life in you. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father: so he that eateth me, also he shall live because of me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven: not as the fathers did eat, and died: he that eateth this bread shall live for ever.”<sup>2</sup> Several of his disciples were offended at such obstinacy in paradox, and ceased to follow him. Jesus did not retract; he only added: “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you, are spirit, and are life.”<sup>3</sup> The twelve remained faithful, in spite of this strange preaching. To Cephas in particular it gave an opportunity of showing his absolute devotion, and of proclaiming once more, “Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

It is probable that from that time some custom derived from the discourse, so ill received by the people of Capernaum, was established in the common repasts of the sect. But on this subject apostolic traditions diverge very greatly, and are probably incomplete by design. The synoptic Gospels, the narratives of which are confirmed by St. Paul, suppose a unique sacramental act to have served

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 48-51.

<sup>2</sup> John vi. 52 58.

<sup>3</sup> John vi. 63.

as the origin of the mysterious rite, and identify it with "the Last Supper." The fourth Gospel, which records for us the incident at the synagogue of Capernaum, does not speak of such an act, although it describes the Last Supper at considerable length. Elsewhere we see Jesus recognised in the breaking of bread, as though to those who sought his company this were one of his most characteristic acts. When he was dead, the form under which he appeared to the pious memory of his disciples was that of the ruler of a mysterious banquet, taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it, and presenting it to those present. It is probable that this was one of his habits, and that at such moments he was particularly loving and tender. One material circumstance, the presence of fish on the table (a striking indication which proves that the rite originated on the shore of Lake Tiberias), was itself almost sacramental, and became a necessary part of current conceptions of the sacred feast.

These repasts were amongst the sweetest moments of the infant community. On such occasions they all gathered together; the Master spoke to each one, and kept up a conversation full of charm and gaiety. Jesus loved these meetings, and was pleased to see his spiritual family thus grouped around him. Eating of the same bread was considered as a kind of communion, a reciprocal bond. On this point the Master used extremely strong terms, which were afterwards taken in an unduly literal sense. Jesus was at once extremely idealistic in his conceptions, and extremely materialistic in his expression of them. Desiring to express the thought that the believer only lives by him, that he was wholly, body, blood, and soul, the life of the truly faithful, he said to his disciples, "I am your food,"—a phrase which, turned into figurative style, became, "My

flesh is your bread, my blood your drink." And then the modes of speech employed by Jesus, which were always strongly subjective, carried him still further. At table, pointing to the food, he said, "I am here"—holding the bread—"this is my body;" and of the wine, "This is my blood,"—all manners of speech equivalent to "I am your food."

This mysterious rite acquired great importance in the lifetime of Jesus. It was probably established some little time before the last journey to Jerusalem, and it resulted from a general doctrine much more than from a determinate act. After the death of Jesus, it became the great symbol of Christian communion, and it was with the most solemn moment of the Saviour's life that its origin was connected. Christians wished to see, in the consecration of bread and wine, a memory of farewell which Jesus, at the moment of passing from life, had left to his disciples. They found Jesus himself in this sacrament. The wholly spiritual conception of the presence of souls, which was one of the Master's most familiar ideas, and made him say, for example, that he was, in his own person, with his disciples when they gathered together in his name, made this easily admissible. Jesus, as we have already said, had never any definite notions of what constitutes individuality. At the height of exaltation to which he had attained, the ideal surpassed all else so far, that the body counted for nothing. We are one when we love one another, when we live one for another; thus it was that he and his disciples were one. His disciples adopted the same phraseology. Those who for years had lived with him had always seen him take the bread and the cup "in his holy and venerable hands,"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Canon of the Greek Masses and the Latin Mass (very ancient).

and thus offer himself to them. It was he whom they ate and drank; he became the true Passover, the ancient one having been revoked by his blood. It is impossible to translate into our essentially determinate language, in which a rigid distinction between the literal and the metaphorical must always be observed, habits of style the essence of which is the attribution of full reality to the metaphor, or rather to the idea the metaphor represents.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## GROWING PROGRESS OF ENTHUSIASM AND EXALTATION.

IT is clear that a religious society of this nature, founded solely on expectation of the kingdom of God, must be in itself very incomplete. The first Christian generation lived almost entirely on anticipations and dreams. On the eve of beholding the world come to an end, they regarded as useless all that served only to prolong it. Fondness for property was looked on as a sin. All that attaches man to earth, all that draws him away from heaven, was to be shunned. Although several of the disciples were married, it would seem that no marriages were contracted after entrance into the sect. Celibacy was greatly preferred. At one moment the Master apparently approved of those who mutilated themselves in prospect of the kingdom of God. In this he was consistent with his principle, "If thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed or halt rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. And if thine eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire."<sup>1</sup> Cessation from

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 8, 9.

generation was often regarded as the sign and condition of the kingdom of God.

Never, it is clear, would this primitive Church have formed a lasting society but for the great variety of seeds sown by Jesus in his teaching. More than a century was necessary for the true Christian Church—that which has converted the world—to disentangle itself from this little sect of “latter-day saints,” and become a framework applicable to human society as a whole. The same thing occurred indeed in the case of Buddhism, which at first was founded only for monks. The same thing would have happened in the order of St. Francis had that order succeeded in its design of becoming the rule of the whole of human society. Essentially Utopian in their origin, owing their success to their exaggerations, the great systems we have just mentioned have only conquered the world by being profoundly modified and by abandoning their excesses. Jesus did not go beyond this first and entirely monachal period, with its belief that the impossible can be attempted with impunity. He made no concession to necessity. He boldly preached war upon nature and total severance from ties of blood. “Verily I say unto you,” he said, “There is no man that hath left house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life.”<sup>1</sup>

The instructions which Jesus is said to have given his disciples breathe the same exaltation. He who was so tolerant to the outside world, he who was sometimes contented with half adhesions, exercised extreme rigour towards his own followers. He would have no “all buts.” His

<sup>1</sup> Luke xviii. 29, 30.

disciples might be described as an order governed by the austere rules. Faithful to his idea that the cares of life trouble man and abase him, Jesus demanded of his associates complete severance from earth and perfect devotion to his work. They were to carry with them neither money nor provisions for the way, not even a scrip or change of raiment. They had to practise absolute poverty, to live on alms and hospitality. "Freely ye received, freely give,"<sup>1</sup> he said in his beautiful language. If arrested and arraigned before judges, they were not to prepare their defence; the heavenly advocate would inspire them with what they were to say. The Father would send his Spirit from on high upon them, and this Spirit would become the principle of all their acts, the director of their thoughts, their guide through the whole world. If driven from any town, they were to shake the dust from their shoes, at all times giving testimony of the proximity of the kingdom of God, that none might plead ignorance. "Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel," he added, "till the Son of man be come."<sup>2</sup>

A strange ardour breathes through all these discourses, which in part may be the creation of his disciples' enthusiasm; but, even in that case, they came indirectly from Jesus himself, for it was he who had inspired the enthusiasm. To those who desired to follow him he predicted severe persecutions and the hatred of mankind. He sent them forth as lambs into the midst of wolves. They would be scourged in the synagogues and dragged to prison. Brother would deliver up brother, and father, son. When they were persecuted in one country, they were to flee into another. "A disciple," said he, "is not above his master,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. x. 23.

nor a servant above his lord. . . . Be not afraid of them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. . . . Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father; but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows." "Every one therefore," he continued, "who shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven."<sup>1</sup>

In his passionate severity he went so far as to abolish all natural feeling. His exactions had no longer any bounds. Despising the healthy limits of man's nature, he demanded that he should exist only for him, that he should love him alone. "If any man cometh unto me," he said, "and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."<sup>2</sup> "So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."<sup>3</sup> At such moments there was something strange and more than human in his words; they were as a fire, consuming life at its very root, and reducing all to a frightful wilderness. The harsh and gloomy feeling of disgust for the world and of excessive self-abnegation which characterises Christian perfection, was founded, not by the subtle and cheerful moralist of earlier days, but by the sombre giant whom a kind of mighty presentiment was withdrawing more and more from the pale of humanity. It might be said that, in these moments of warfare with the heart's most legitimate cravings, Jesus had forgotten the pleasure of living, of loving, of seeing, and of feeling.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 24, 28, 29-33.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xiv. 26

<sup>3</sup> Luke xiv. 33.

Passing still further beyond all limits, he even said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."<sup>1</sup> "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."<sup>2</sup> "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose or forfeit his own self?"<sup>3</sup> Two anecdotes of a kind that cannot be accepted as historical, but which, although exaggerations, were intended to represent a characteristic feature, aptly illustrate this defiance thrown down to nature. He said to one man, "Follow me!" "But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." To this Jesus answered, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead: but go thou and publish abroad the kingdom of God. And another also said, I will follow thee, Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house. But Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup> Extraordinary self-confidence, and, at times, accents of singular sweetness, reversing all our ideas of him, caused these exaggerations to be easily received. "Come unto me," he cried, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."<sup>5</sup>

A great danger necessarily threatened the future of this exalted morality, thus expressed in hyperbolical language and

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. x. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Luke ix. 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> Luke ix. 59-62.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xi. 28-30.

with terrible energy. By severing man from earth, the ties of life were riven asunder. The Christian was to be praised for being a bad son or a bad patriot, if it were for Christ that he resisted his father and fought against his country. The ancient city, the republic, mother of her citizens, the state, and the common law were thus considered hostile to the kingdom of God; a fatal germ of theocracy was implanted in the world.

From this point another consequence can be perceived. A morality such as this, created for a temporary crisis, must seem impossible when brought into a peaceful country, a community assured of its own duration. Thus the Gospel was destined to become for Christians a Utopia which few would care to realise. For the great majority these terrible maxims would rest in profound oblivion, an oblivion encouraged by the clergy itself; the Gospel man would be a dangerous man. The most selfish, proud, harsh, and materialistic of all human beings—a Louis XIV. for instance—would find priests to persuade him, in spite of the Gospel, that he was a Christian. But, on the other hand, there were always to be found holy men who took the sublime paradoxes of Jesus literally. Perfection being set beyond ordinary social conditions, and a complete Gospel life being only possible outside the world, the principle of asceticism and monasticism was established. Christian societies were destined to have two moral codes—the one moderately heroic for ordinary men, the other excessively exalted for the perfect man; and the perfect man would be a monk, subjected to rules which professed to realise the Gospel ideal. It is obvious that this ideal, were it only on account of its enforced celibacy and poverty, could not become a law for all. In one sense the monk

would be thus the only true Christian. Ordinary common sense has a repulsion from such excesses, taking as its standpoint that desire for the impossible is a mark of weakness and error. But ordinary common sense is a bad judge where great matters are in question. To obtain a little from humanity, we must ask much. The immense moral progress due to the Gospel is the result of its exaggerations. It is thus that, like Stoicism but with infinitely greater fulness, it has been a living argument for man's divine powers, a monument raised to the potency of the will.

It may easily be imagined that to Jesus, at this period of his life, all that was not of the kingdom of God had absolutely faded away. He was, if one can say so, entirely outside nature; family, friendship, country, had no longer any meaning for him. There can be no doubt that from this moment he had sealed his fate. Sometimes one is tempted to believe that, seeing in his own death a means of founding his kingdom, he deliberately determined to allow himself to be slain. At other times, although such a thought only latterly became a doctrine, death presented itself to his mind as a sacrifice, destined to appease his Father and save mankind. A singular taste for persecution and tortures possessed him. His blood appeared to him as the water of a second baptism with which he ought to be baptised, and he seemed full of a strange longing to hasten this baptism, which alone could quench his thirst.

The grandeur of his views on the future was at times surprising. He did not deceive himself about the terrible storm he was to raise in the world. "Think not," he said with intrepidity and beauty, "that I am come to send

peace on earth ; I came not to send peace but a sword. . . . There shall be from henceforth five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. . . . For I come to set a man against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."<sup>1</sup> "I came to cast fire upon the earth ; and what will I, if it is already kindled."<sup>2</sup> "They shall put you out of the synagogues," he continued, "yea, the hour cometh that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God."<sup>3</sup> "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before it hated you. Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecute me, they will also persecute you."<sup>4</sup>

Carried away by this fearful increase of enthusiasm, and governed by the necessity of a mission that day by day grew more exalted, Jesus was no longer a free agent ; he belonged to his work, and, in one sense, to mankind. Sometimes one would have said that his reason seemed affected. He suffered mental anguish and agitation. The great vision of the kingdom of God always shining before his eyes made him dizzy. It must be remembered that his disciples at times thought him mad, and that his enemies declared him to be possessed. His excessively passionate temperament carried him incessantly beyond the bounds of human nature. His work was not a work of reason, and, holding the human intellect in derision, what he most imperatively demanded was "faith." This was the word most frequently repeated in the little group of saints. It is the watchword

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 34-36, and Luke xii. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xii. 49

<sup>3</sup> John xvi 2.

<sup>4</sup> John xv. 18, 20.



of all popular movements. No such movement, it is clear, would take place at all, were it necessary that its author should win his disciples one after another by dint of logically deduced demonstrations. Reflection only leads to doubt. If the authors of the French Revolution, for example, had had to be previously convinced by prolonged meditations, they would have all grown old without achieving anything. Jesus, in like manner, aimed less at regular conviction than at the excitement of enthusiasm. Urgent and imperative, he suffered no opposition; men had to be converted, nothing less would satisfy him. His natural gentleness seemed to have abandoned him; at times he was harsh and capricious. Occasionally his disciples did not understand him, and in his presence had a feeling akin to fear. His displeasure at the slightest opposition led him to inexplicable and apparently absurd actions.

It was not that his virtue deteriorated; but his struggle for the ideal against reality became insupportable. Contact with the world wounded and revolted him. Obstacles caused him irritation. His idea of the Son of God became blurred and exaggerated. Divinity is intermittent; one cannot be Son of God all through a lifetime without a break. One is so at certain times by sudden flashes of light which become lost in the midst of long intervals of darkness. The fatal law which condemns an idea to decay as soon as it seeks the conversion of men applied to him. The tone he had adopted could not be kept up for more than a few months; it was time that death came to cut the knot of a situation strained to the utmost point, to remove him from the impossibilities of an interminable path, and, by delivering him from an over-prolonged trial, to lead him forth sinless into heavenly peace.

## CHAPTER XX.

## OPPOSITION TO JESUS.

DURING the first epoch of his career, it seems as though Jesus met with no serious opposition. His preaching, thanks to the extreme liberty enjoyed in Galilee, and to the number of teachers who arose on every hand, made little impression beyond a somewhat restricted circle. But when Jesus entered upon a path brilliant with wonders and public successes, the first mutterings of storm began to make themselves heard. More than once he had to conceal himself and fly. Antipas, however, did not interfere with him, although Jesus sometimes made very severe comments on him. At Tiberias, his usual residence, the tetrarch was only one or two leagues distant from the district chosen by Jesus as the centre of his activity; he heard reports of his miracles, and, no doubt taking them to be clever tricks, he desired to see them. Sceptics were at that time very curious about illusions of this description. With his ordinary tact, Jesus declined to gratify him. He took care not to mingle with an irreligious world which wished to derive idle amusement from him; he aspired only to gain the people; for the simple he reserved means fitted for them alone.

On one occasion, the report was spread that Jesus was

none other than John the Baptist risen from the dead. Antipas became anxious and ill at ease, and used artifice to rid his dominions of the new prophet. Certain Pharisees, under the pretence of regard for Jesus, came to tell him that Antipas was seeking to have him slain. Jesus, despite his great simplicity, saw the snare and did not depart. His peaceful habits and his abstinence from popular agitation ultimately reassured the tetrarch and dissipated the danger.

It must not be supposed that the new doctrine was received with equal favour in all the towns of Galilee. Not only did sceptical Nazareth continue to repulse him who was to become its glory; not only did his brothers persist in their lack of faith in him, but the cities of the lake themselves, albeit generally well disposed, were not all converted. Jesus often complained of the incredulity and hardness of heart which he encountered, and although it may be natural to make allowance in such reproaches for the exaggeration of the preacher, although we are sensible of that kind of *convicium seculi* which Jesus affected in imitation of John the Baptist, it is clear that the country was far from giving itself up entirely to the kingdom of God. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" cried he; "for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Howbeit I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto Heaven? thou shalt go down unto Hades; for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day. Howbeit I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for

the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.”<sup>1</sup> “The queen of the south,” he added, “shall rise up in judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here.”<sup>2</sup> His wandering life, at first so full of charm, now began to weigh upon him. “The foxes,” said he, “have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”<sup>3</sup> He accused unbelievers of not yielding to evidence. Bitterness and reproach become more and more frequent with him.

Jesus, in fact, was not capable of receiving opposition with the coolness of the philosopher, who, understanding the reasons for the various opinions which share the world, finds it perfectly natural that all should not agree with him. One of the principal faults of the Jewish race is its harshness in controversy, and the abusive tone which it almost always imports into it. There have never in the world been such bitter quarrels as those of the Jews amongst themselves. It is a feeling for fine shades of opinion that makes the polished and moderate man. But lack of this feeling is one of the most persistent features of the Semitic mind. Subtle and refined works, such as the *Dialogues of Plato*, are altogether foreign to these nations. Jesus, who was free from almost all the failings of his race, whose leading characteristic indeed was an infinite delicacy, was led, in spite of himself, to employ the polemical style in general

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 21-24.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xii. 41, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. viii. 20.

use. Like John the Baptist, he used very harsh terms against his opponents. Of an exquisite gentleness with the simple, he was irritated at incredulity, however little aggressive it might be. He was no longer the mild teacher of the "Sermon on the Mount," who had as yet met with neither resistance nor difficulty. The passion which underlay his character led him to make use of the keenest invectives. This singular union ought not to cause us surprise. M. de Lamennais, a man of our own times, has strikingly presented the same contrast with remarkable vigour. In his beautiful book, the *Words of a Believer*, the most immoderate wrath and the sweetest relentings alternate with one another as in a mirage. This man, who was extremely kind in social intercourse, became madly intractable towards those who did not think as he did. Jesus, in like manner, applied to himself, not without reason, the passage from Isaiah: "He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench."<sup>1</sup> And yet many of the recommendations addressed by him to his disciples contain germs of real fanaticism, germs which the Middle Ages were destined to develop cruelly. Is he to be reproached for this? No revolution is effected without some harshness. Had Luther, or the actors in the French Revolution, been compelled to observe the rules of politeness, neither Reformation nor Revolution would have been accomplished. Let us congratulate ourselves in like manner that Jesus encountered no law to punish the invectives he uttered against one class of citizens. Otherwise the Pharisees would have been inviolate. All great human things have been achieved in the name of absolute prin-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii. 19, 20.

ciples. A critical philosopher would have said to his disciples: "Respect the opinion of others; and believe that no one is so completely right that his opponent is completely wrong." But the action of Jesus had nothing in common with the disinterested speculation of the philosopher. To feel that one has touched the ideal for a moment, and has been frustrated by the wickedness of a few, is a thought insupportable to a fervent soul. What must it have been to the founder of a new world?

The invincible obstacle to the ideas of Jesus came above all from the Pharisees. Jesus diverged more and more from the Judaism that was reputed orthodox. Now, the Pharisees were the true Jews; the very nerve and sinew of Judaism. Although this party had its head-quarters at Jerusalem, it had adherents who were either settled in Galilee, or often resorted there. As a rule they were men of narrow mind, greatly concerned with externals; and their piety was haughty, formal, and self-satisfied. Their manners were ridiculous, and excited the amusement even of those who respected them. The epithets which were given to them by the people, savouring of caricature, prove this. There was the "bandy-legged Pharisee" (*Nikfi*), who walked in the streets shuffling his feet and knocking them against the stones; the "bloody-browed Pharisee" (*Kizai*), who went about with his eyes shut to avoid seeing women, and dashed his forehead so much against the walls that it was always blood-stained; the "pestle Pharisee" (*Medinkia*), who kept himself bent double like the handle of a pestle; the "strong-shouldered Pharisee" (*Shikmi*), who walked with his back bent as though on his shoulders he carried the whole burden of the Law; the "What-is-there-to-do?-I-do-it Pharisee," ever on

the watch for a precept to fulfil; and lastly, the "dyed Pharisee," whose devotional external aspect was but a varnish of hypocrisy. This strictness, in fact, was often only apparent, and, in reality, concealed great moral laxity. The people nevertheless was deceived by it. The people, whose instinct is always right, even when it is most astray as regards individuals, is very easily duped by false devotees. That which it loves in them is good and worthy of being loved; but it has not sufficient insight to distinguish between appearance and reality.

The antipathy which, in such a highly-strung state of society, must necessarily break forth between Jesus and men of this character, is easy to understand. Jesus recognised only the religion of the heart; while that of the Pharisees almost exclusively consisted in observances. Jesus sought the humble and outcast of all kinds, and in this the Pharisees saw an insult to their religion of respectability. The Pharisee was an infallible and impeccable man, a pedant always right in his own estimation, taking the principal place in the synagogue, praying in the street, giving alms to the sound of a trumpet, and ever on the watch for salutations. Jesus maintained that every man should await the judgment of God with fear and trembling. The evil religious tendency represented by Pharisaism did not reign without opposition. Many men before or during the time of Jesus, such as Jesus son of Sirach (one of the true ancestors of Jesus of Nazareth), Gamaliel, Antigonus of Soco, and, above all, the gentle and noble Hillel, had taught very lofty doctrines almost of a Gospel character. But these good seeds had been choked. The beautiful maxims of Hillel, summing up the whole Law as equity, those of Jesus son of Sirach, making worship consist in

doing good, were forgotten or anathematised. Shammai, with his narrow and exclusive spirit, had conquered. An enormous mass of "traditions" had stifled the Law, under pretext of protecting and interpreting it. No doubt these conservative measures may have been useful in their way; it is well that the Jewish people should have loved its Law even to madness, since it was this frantic love which, by saving Mosaism under Antiochus Epiphanes and under Herod, preserved the leaven necessary for the birth of Christianity. But in themselves, these old precautions were only puerile. The synagogue, which was the depository of them, was nothing more than a parent of error. Its reign was at an end; and yet to require its abdication was to require that which an established power has never done or been able to do.

The conflicts of Jesus with official hypocrisy were incessant. The ordinary tactics of reformers, who come to the front in a state of religious matters such as we have just described, which may be termed "traditional formalism," are to oppose the "text" of the sacred books to "traditions." Religious zeal always innovates, even when it claims to be in the highest degree conservative. Just as the neo-Catholics of our own time are steadily growing more and more remote from the Gospel, so the Pharisees left the Bible at each step farther distant. This is why the Puritan reformer is, as a rule, essentially "biblical," taking the unchangeable text as a base from which to criticise current theology, which has changed from one generation to another. Thus acted later, the Karaites and the Protestants. Jesus applied the axe to the root of the tree much more forcibly. Sometimes, it is true, we see him invoke the text against the false *masores* or traditions of the



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Pharisees. But in general he dwells lightly on exegesis—it is to conscience that he appeals. With one stroke he cuts through both text and commentaries. While he pointed out to the Pharisees that they seriously perverted Mosaism by their traditions, he himself made no pretence of a return to Moses. His goal was in the future, not in the past. Jesus was more than the reformer of an obsolete religion; he was the creator of the eternal religion of humanity.

Disputes broke out, especially regarding a number of external practices introduced by tradition, which neither Jesus nor his disciples observed. The Pharisees reproached him strongly for this. When he dined with them, he greatly scandalised them by failing to observe the customary ablu-tions. "Howbeit give for alms," said he, "those things which are within; and behold, all things are clean unto you."<sup>1</sup> What hurt his sense of delicacy most was the air of assurance which the Pharisees exhibited in religious matters, and their paltry worship, which resulted in a vain search after precedence and titles, and by no means in bettering their hearts. An admirable parable embodied this thought with infinite charm and justice. "Two men," said he, "went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I say unto you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke xi. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xviii. 9-14.

A hatred, which death alone could satisfy, was the consequence of these controversies. John the Baptist had already provoked enmities of the same character. But the aristocrats of Jerusalem, who despised him, had permitted simple folk to take him for a prophet. In this case however the war was to the death. A new spirit had appeared in the world, making all that had come before it crumble to decay. John the Baptist was essentially a Jew; Jesus was scarcely one at all. Jesus always appealed to the delicacy of the moral sentiment. He was a disputant only when he argued against the Pharisees, his opponents forcing him, as nearly always happens, to adopt their tone. His exquisite irony, his sharp provocations, always struck home. They were everlasting stigmas, which have remained festering in the wound. This Nessus-shirt of ridicule, which for eighteen centuries the Jew, son of the Pharisees, has dragged in tatters after him, was woven by Jesus with divine skill. Masterpieces of fine raillery, their features are written in lines of fire on the flesh of the hypocrite and the false devotee. Incomparable features, worthy of a son of God! Only a god knows how to kill after this fashion. Socrates and Molière can but touch the skin. Jesus carries fire and rage to the very marrow.

But it was also just that this great master of irony should pay for his triumph with his life. Even in Galilee, the Pharisees sought to ruin him, and put in force against him the manœuvre which was later to prove successful at Jerusalem. They endeavoured to interest the partisans of the newly-founded political faction in their quarrel. The facilities for escape found by Jesus in Galilee, and the weakness of the government of Antipas, baffled these

attempts. He ran into danger of his own free will. He saw clearly that his action, if he remained confined to Galilee, was of necessity limited. Judæa drew him as by a charm; he wished to attempt one last effort to win the rebellious city; and seemed anxious to fulfil the proverb—that a prophet ought not to die outside Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE LAST JOURNEY OF JESUS TO JERUSALEM.

FOR a long time Jesus had been aware of the dangers surrounding him. During a period of time which may be estimated at eighteen months, he avoided going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. At the feast of Tabernacles of the year 32 (according to the hypothesis we have adopted) his relatives, always malevolent and sceptical, pressed him to go there. The evangelist John seems to insinuate that in this invitation there was some hidden project to ruin Jesus. "Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may behold thy works which thou doest. For no man doeth anything in secret, and himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou doest these things, manifest thyself to the world."<sup>1</sup> Jesus, suspecting some treachery, at first refused; but when the caravan of pilgrims had started, he set out on the journey, unknown to every one, and almost alone. It was the last farewell that he bade to Galilee. The feast of Tabernacles fell at the autumnal equinox. Six months had still to elapse before the fatal consummation. But during this interval Jesus never again saw his beloved northern land. The days of pleasantness

<sup>1</sup> John vii. 3, 4.

have passed away; step by step he must now traverse the path of sorrows that will only end in the anguish of death.

His disciples, and the pious women who followed him, met him again in Judæa. But how greatly was all changed for him here! In Jerusalem Jesus was a stranger. Here he felt a wall of resistance he could not penetrate. Hemmed in by snares and difficulties, he was unceasingly dogged by the enmity of the Pharisees. Instead of that illimitable faculty of belief, the happy gift of youthful natures, which he found in Galilee—instead of those good and gentle folk, amongst whom objections (which are always in part the fruit of evil thinking and indocility) had no existence, here at every step he met with an obstinate scepticism, upon which the means of action that had succeeded in the north so well had little effect. His disciples were despised as being Galileans. Nicodemus, who, on one of the former visits of Jesus, had had a nocturnal interview, almost compromised himself with the Sanhedrim by his desire to defend him. “Art thou also of Galilee?” they said to him. “Search and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.”<sup>1</sup>

The city, as we have already remarked, displeased Jesus. Until now he had always avoided great centres, preferring rural districts and towns of small importance for his field of action. Many of the precepts which he gave to his apostles were absolutely inapplicable, except in a simple community of humble folk. Since he had no conception of the world, and was accustomed only to the kindly communism of Galilee, remarks constantly escaped him, the simplicity of which might well appear odd at Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> John vii. 52.

His imagination and his love of nature felt constraint within its walls. It is not the destiny of true religion to emerge from the tumult of towns, but from the tranquil quietude of the fields.

The arrogance of the priests made the courts of the Temple disagreeable to him. One day some of his disciples, who knew Jerusalem better than he, wished him to notice the beauty of the Temple buildings, the admirable choice of materials, and the richness of the votive offerings which covered the walls. "See ye not all these things," said he; "verily I say unto you there shall not be left here one stone upon another."<sup>1</sup> He refused to admire anything, unless it was a poor widow who passed at that moment and threw a small coin into the box. "This poor widow cast in more than they all," said he; "for all these did of their superfluity cast in unto their gifts: but she of her want did cast in all the living that she had."<sup>2</sup> This habit of criticising all that was going on at Jerusalem, of exalting the poor who gave little, of slighting the rich who gave much, and of rebuking the wealthy priests who did nothing for the good of the people, naturally exasperated the sacerdotal caste. As the seat of a conservative aristocracy, the Temple, like the Mussulman *Haram* which has succeeded it, was the last place in the world in which revolutions could triumph. Imagine a reformer going in our own time to preach the overthrow of Islamism round the Mosque of Omar! The Temple, however, was the centre of Jewish life, the point at which victory or death was essential. On this Calvary, where Jesus assuredly suffered more than at Golgotha, his days were passed in disputation and bitterness, in the midst of tedious controversies about canonical law

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxi. 3, 4.

and exegesis, for which his great moral grandeur, far from giving him any advantage, positively unfitted him.

In his troubled life at this period, the sensitive and kindly heart of Jesus was able to find a refuge, where he enjoyed much tranquillity. After having passed the day disputing in the Temple, Jesus used to descend at evening into the valley of Kedron, and rest awhile in the orchard of a kind of farm (probably a place where oil was made) called Gethsemane, which served as a pleasure-garden to the inhabitants. Thence he would proceed to pass the night upon the Mount of Olives, which shuts in the horizon of the city on the east. This district is the only one, in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, presenting an aspect that is in any way pleasing and verdant. Groves of olives, figs, and palms were numerous there, and gave their names to the villages, farms, or enclosures of Bethphage, Gethsemane, and Bethany. Upon the Mount of Olives were two great cedars, the memory of which was long cherished amongst the dispersed Jews; their branches served as a refuge for beevies of doves, and under their shade were established small bazaars. The whole precinct was in a manner the abode of Jesus and his disciples; they evidently knew it field by field and house by house.

In particular the village of Bethany, situated at the summit of the hill, upon the slope which commands the Dead Sea and the Jordan, at a journey of an hour and a half from Jerusalem, was the place especially loved by Jesus. There he made the acquaintance of a family of three persons, two sisters and a third member, whose friendship had a great charm for him. Of the two sisters, the one called Martha was an obliging, kind woman, assiduous in her attentions; while the other, Mary, on the contrary,

pleased Jesus by a kind of languor, and by her highly developed speculative tendencies. Seated at the feet of Jesus, she often forgot, in listening to his words, the duties of everyday life. Her sister, upon whom all these duties devolved at such times, gently complained. "Martha, Martha," said Jesus to her, "thou art anxious and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful. For Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."<sup>1</sup> A certain Simon the Leper, who was the owner of the house, was apparently the brother of Mary and Martha, or at least formed part of the family. It was there that, in the midst of pious friendship, Jesus forgot the vexations of public life. In this quiet home he consoled himself for the wrangling which the Scribes and the Pharisees never ceased to raise around him. He often sat on the Mount of Olives, facing Mount Moriah, having under his eyes the splendid perspective of the terraces of the Temple, and its roofs covered with glittering plates of metal. This view used to strike strangers with admiration; at sunrise especially the holy mountain dazzled the eyes, and seemed as it were a mass of snow and gold. But a profound feeling of sadness poisoned for Jesus the spectacle that filled all other Israelites with joy and pride. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."<sup>2</sup>

It was not that many honest souls here, as in Galilee, were not touched; but such was the weight of the dominant orthodoxy, that very few dared to avow it. Men feared to discredit themselves in the eyes of the Hierosolymites by

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 41, 42.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiii. 37.



placing themselves in the school of a Galilean. They would have risked expulsion from the synagogue, which, in a mean and bigoted society, was the greatest degradation possible. Excommunication besides carried with it confiscation of all property. By ceasing to be a Jew, a man did not become a Roman; he remained defenceless under the power of a theocratic legislation of the most atrocious severity. One day the lower officers of the Temple, who had been present at one of the discourses of Jesus, and had been enchanted with it, came to confide their doubts to the priests: "Hath any of the rulers believed on him, or of the Pharisees?" was the reply to them; "but this multitude who knoweth not the Law are accursed."<sup>1</sup> Jesus thus remained at Jerusalem, a provincial admired by provincials like himself, but rejected by all the aristocracy of the nation. Chiefs of schools and of sects were too numerous for any one to be stirred by seeing one more appear. His voice made little impression in Jerusalem. Racial and sectarian prejudices, the open enemies of the spirit of the Gospel, were too deeply rooted.

His teaching in this new world necessarily became greatly modified. His beautiful discourses, the effect of which was always marked upon hearers with youthful imaginations and consciences morally pure, here fell upon stone. He who was so much at ease on the shores of his charming little lake felt constrained and in a strange land when he confronted pedants. His perpetual self-assertion took a somewhat fastidious tone. He had to become controversialist, jurist, exegetist, and theologian. His conversations, generally so full of grace, were transformed into a rolling fire of disputes, an interminable series of scholastic battles.

<sup>1</sup> John vii. 48, 49.

His harmonious genius was wasted away in insipid argumentations upon the Law and the Prophets, in which we should have preferred not to see him sometimes play the part of aggressor. With a regrettable condescension he lent himself to the captious criticisms to which tactless cavillers subjected him. As a rule he extricated himself from difficulties with much skill. His reasonings, it is true, were often subtle (for simplicity of mind and subtlety are akin; when simplicity reasons, it is always a little sophistical); we find that he sometimes courted misconceptions, and intentionally prolonged them; his reasoning, judged by the rules of Aristotelian logic, was very weak. But when the unparalleled charm of his mind could be shown, he was triumphant. One day it was intended to embarrass him by presenting an adulteress to him, and asking him what should be done with her. We know the admirable response of Jesus. The fine raillery of a man of the world, tempered by a divine charity, could not be more exquisitely expressed. But the wit allied to moral grandeur is that which fools can least forgive. With his words so just and pure in their taste: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,"<sup>1</sup> Jesus pierced hypocrisy to the heart, and with the same stroke sealed his own death-warrant.

It is probable indeed that, but for the exasperation caused by so many bitter shafts, Jesus might have long been able to remain unnoticed, and might have lost himself in the terrible storm which was soon to overwhelm the whole Jewish nation. The higher priesthood and the Sadducees rather disdained than hated him. The great sacerdotal families, the *Boëthusim*, the family of Hanan, were only

<sup>1</sup> John viii. 7.

fanatical when their peace was threatened. The Sadducees, like Jesus, rejected the "traditions" of the Pharisees. By a very strange singularity, it was these sceptics, denying the resurrection, the oral Law, and the existence of angels, who were the true Jews. Or rather, since the old Law in its simplicity no longer satisfied the religious wants of the time, those who held strictly to it and rejected modern inventions were regarded by devotees as impious, just as an evangelical Protestant of the present day is considered an unbeliever in Catholic countries. At all events, from a party such as this no very strong reaction against Jesus could proceed. The official priesthood, with its attention concentrated on political power and closely connected with the former party, did not understand enthusiastic movements of this kind. It was the middle class Pharisees, the innumerable *Soferim* or Scribes making a living by the science of "traditions," who took the alarm; and it was their prejudices and interests that in reality were threatened by the doctrine of the new Master.

One of the most constant efforts of the Pharisees was to draw Jesus into the political arena, and to compromise him as being attached to the party of Judas the Gaulonite. Their tactics were clever; for all the deep wisdom of Jesus was required to avoid embroilment with the Roman authority, in his preaching of the kingdom of God. They desired to cut through his ambiguity, and force him to explain himself. One day a group of Pharisees, and of those politicians who were called "Herodians" (probably some of the *Boëthusim*), approached him, and, under the pretence of pious zeal, said, "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for any one. . . . Tell us therefore, What

thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?"<sup>1</sup> They hoped for a response which would give them a pretext for delivering him up to Pilate. The answer of Jesus was admirable. He made them show him the image on a coin: "Render therefore," said he, "unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's."<sup>2</sup> Such were the profound words which decided the future of Christianity! Words of the most perfect spirituality, and of marvellous justice, which established the separation of the spiritual from the temporal, and laid the foundation of true liberalism and true civilisation!

His gentle and irresistible genius inspired him, when alone with his disciples, with accents full of tenderness. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door unto the fold of the sheep, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. . . . The sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. . . . He goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice. . . . The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy. . . . He that is an hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth. . . . I am the good shepherd and I know mine own, and mine own know me . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep."<sup>3</sup> The idea that the crisis of humanity was close at hand frequently recurred to him: "Now," said he, "from the fig-tree learn her parable: When her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxii. 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxii. 21.

<sup>3</sup> John x. 1-15.

nigh.”<sup>1</sup> “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”<sup>2</sup>

His powerful eloquence always burst forth when he had to contend with hypocrisy. “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.

“But all their works do they for to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutation in the market-places, and to be called of men, Rabbi. . . .

“But woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, even while for a pretence ye make long prayers: therefore ye shall receive greater condemnation. Woe unto you, for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves!”<sup>3</sup>

“Woe unto you! for ye are as the tombs which appear not, and the men that walk over them know it not.”<sup>4</sup>

“Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiv. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxiii. 2-15.

<sup>2</sup> John iv. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xi. 44.

the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel.

“Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside thereof may become clean also.

“Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

“Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore, ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. . . .

“Therefore, behold, I will send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah, son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily, I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation.”<sup>1</sup>

His terrible doctrine of the substitution of the Gentiles—the idea that the kingdom of God was about to be passed

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 23-36.

over to others, because those for whom it was destined would not receive it, used to recur as a fearful menace against the aristocracy. The title "Son of God," which he openly assumed in vivid parables, wherein his enemies were depicted as murderers of the heavenly messengers, was an open defiance to the Judaism of the Law. The bold appeal he addressed to the poor was yet more seditious. He declared that he had come, "that they which see not may see, and that they which see may become blind."<sup>1</sup> One day, his dislike of the Temple evoked an imprudent speech from him: "I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands."<sup>2</sup> We do not know what meaning Jesus attached to this saying, in which his disciples sought for strained allegories; but, as only a pretext was wanted, it was quickly fastened upon. It reappeared in the preamble of his death-warrant, and rang in his ears amid the last agonies of Golgotha. These irritating discussions always ended in tumult. The Pharisees cast stones at him; in doing which they only fulfilled an article in the Law, which commanded that every prophet, even a thaumaturgist, who should turn the people from the ancient worship, was to be stoned without a hearing. At other times they called him mad, possessed, a Samaritan, and even sought to slay him. His words were noted in order to draw down upon him the laws of an intolerant theocracy, which had not yet been abrogated by the Roman power.

<sup>1</sup> John ix. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xiv. 58.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## MACHINATIONS OF THE ENEMIES OF JESUS.

JESUS spent the autumn and part of the winter at Jerusalem. The latter season is somewhat cold there. The portico of Solomon, with its covered aisles, was the place where he habitually walked about. This portico, the only vestige extant of the buildings of the ancient Temple, consisted of two galleries, formed by two rows of columns and the wall overlooking the valley of Kedron. It was entered by the Gate of Shushan, the door-posts of which are still to be seen inside what is now called the "Golden Gate." Even then the other side of the valley was adorned with sumptuous tombs. Some of the monuments, to be seen at the present day, were perhaps the cenotaphs in honour of ancient prophets, which Jesus pointed out when, seated under the portico, he thundered against the official classes, who sheltered their hypocrisy or their vanity behind these colossal piles.

At the end of the month of December, he observed at Jerusalem the feast established by Judas Maccabeus in memory of the purification of the Temple after the sacrileges of Antiochus Epiphanes. It was also called the "Feast of Lights," because, during the eight days of the



feast, lamps were kept lighted in the houses. Soon afterwards Jesus undertook a journey into Perea, and to the banks of the Jordan—that is to say, into the very districts he had visited some years before, when he followed the school of John, and where he had himself administered baptism. He seems to have found consolation in this journey, especially at Jericho. This city, as the terminus of several important routes, or, it may be, because of its gardens of spices and its richly cultivated soil, was a customs station of importance. The chief receiver, Zaccheus, a rich man, desired to see Jesus. As he was of small stature, he climbed a sycamore tree near the road along which the procession was to pass. Jesus was touched with this simplicity in a prominent man, and, at the risk of giving offence, he determined to stay in the house of Zaccheus. There was indeed much dissatisfaction at his honouring the house of a sinner by this visit. On leaving Jesus declared his host to be a good son of Abraham; and, as though to add to the vexation of the orthodox, Zaccheus became a holy man; he gave, it was said, the half of his possessions to the poor, and restored fourfold to those whom he might have wronged. But this was not the only joy which Jesus experienced in Jericho. As he went out of the town, the beggar Bartimæus pleased him much by persisting in calling him “Son of David,” even although told to be silent. The cycle of Galilean miracles appeared for a time to be renewed in this country, which in many respects resembled the northern provinces. The delightful oasis of Jericho, which was at that time well watered, must have been one of the most beautiful places in Syria. Josephus speaks of it with the same admiration as of Galilee, and calls it, like the latter province, a “divine land.”

After Jesus had accomplished this kind of pilgrimage to the scenes of his earliest prophetic activity, he returned to his beloved abode at Bethany. What must have most afflicted the faithful Galileans at Jerusalem was that he worked no miracles there. Weary of the cold reception which the kingdom of God found in the capital, it would seem that the friends of Jesus wished at times for a great miracle which should powerfully impress Hierosolymite scepticism. A resurrection from the dead necessarily appeared most likely to carry conviction. We may suppose that Mary and Martha opened their minds to Jesus on this matter. Fame already attributed two or three acts of the kind to him. "If some one rose from the dead," the pious sisters no doubt said, "perhaps the living would repent." "No," Jesus must have replied, "even were a man raised from the dead they would not believe." Then, recalling a story familiar to him, that of the good beggar covered with sores who died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, he may have added, "Lazarus might return and they would not have faith." Later, singular misconceptions arose on this subject. The hypothesis was transformed into an actual fact. People spoke of Lazarus as having been raised from the dead, and of the unpardonable obstinacy of those who could resist such testimony. The sores of Lazarus and the leprosy of Simon the Leper were confused with one another, and the idea that Mary and Martha had a brother called Lazarus, whom Jesus caused to come forth from the tomb, became part of the tradition. When one knows of what inexact rumours and cock-and-bull stories the gossip of an Eastern town consists, one does not even regard it as impossible that a report of this nature may have been current in Jerusalem in the life-

time of Jesus, and that it may have had fatal consequences for him.

Somewhat remarkable indications, in fact, seem to lead us to believe that certain causes proceeding from Bethany contributed to hasten the death of Jesus. At moments one is tempted to suppose that the family at Bethany were guilty of some imprudence, or fell into an excess of zeal. Perhaps the ardent desire of silencing those who scornfully denied the divine mission of their friend drove these women, who were of passionate nature, beyond all bounds. It must also be remembered that in this impure and depressing Jerusalem Jesus was no longer himself. Not by any fault of his own, but by that of men, his conscience had lost something of its early purity. In despair and driven to extremity, he was no longer his own master. His mission weighed him down and he let himself be carried away by the torrent. In a few days death was to give him his divine freedom and rescue him from the fatal necessities of a position which at every hour demanded more of him, grew more difficult to hold.

The contrast between his ever-increasing exaltation and the indifference of the Jews became wider day by day. At the same time the public authorities began to be bitter against him. In the month of February or early in March a council of the chief priests was assembled, and at this council the question was clearly put: "Can Jesus and Judaism exist together?" To raise the question was to resolve it; and, without being a prophet, as the evangelist would have it, the high priest might very naturally pronounce his cruel axiom: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John xi. 50.

“The high priest of that year,” to use an expression of the fourth Gospel, which well expresses the state of abasement to which the sovereign pontificate had been reduced, was Joseph Kaiapha, who had been appointed by Valerius Gratus, and was entirely devoted to the Romans. Since Jerusalem had been under the government of procurators, the office of high priest had become a revocable post, and changes in it took place nearly every year. Kaiapha however held it longer than any one else. He assumed his office in the year 25, and he did not lose it till the year 36. Nothing is known of his character, and many circumstances lead to the belief that his power was only nominal. Beside and above him indeed we always see another man who, at the decisive moment we have now reached, appears to have exercised a preponderating power.

This man was Hanan or Annas, son of Seth, and father-in-law of Kaiapha. He had formerly been the high priest, and in reality had kept, amidst the frequent changes in the pontificate, all the authority of the office. He had received the high priesthood from the legate Quirinius, in the year 7 of our era. He lost his office in the year 14, on the accession of Tiberius; but he retained much importance. He was still called “high priest,” although out of office, and was consulted upon all grave questions. During fifty years the pontificate remained in his family almost without interruption; five of his sons successively sustained the dignity, besides Kaiapha, who was his son-in-law. His was called the “priestly family,” as though the priesthood had become hereditary in it. The chief offices of the Temple were almost all filled by its members. Another family, that of Boëthus, alternated, it is true, with that of Hanan in the pontificate. But the *Boëthusim*, whose

fortunes were not of very honourable origin, were much less esteemed by the pious middle-class. Hanan then was in reality the chief of the priestly party. Kaiapha did nothing without him; their names were habitually associated, and that of Hanan was always put first. It will be understood in fact that under this *régime* of an annual pontificate, changed according to the caprice of the procurators, an old high priest, who had kept the secret of the traditions, had seen many younger than himself succeed one another, and had retained sufficient influence to get the office delegated to persons who in family rank were subordinate to him, must have been a very important personage. Like all the Temple aristocracy, he was a Sadducee, "a sect," says Josephus, "particularly severe in its judgments." All his sons were violent persecutors also. One of them, called like his father, Hanan, caused James, the brother of the Lord, to be stoned, under circumstances not unlike those of the death of Jesus. The family spirit was haughty, bold, and cruel; it had that particular species of proud and sullen wickedness which characterises Jew-politics. Thus it is upon Hanan and his family that the responsibility of all the acts which followed must rest. It was Hanan, or the party he represented, who really put Jesus to death. Hanan was the principal actor in the terrible drama, and, far more than Kaiapha, far more than Pilate, ought to bear the weight of mankind's maledictions.

It is in the mouth of Kaiapha that the author of the fourth Gospel chooses to place the decisive words that led to sentence of death on Jesus. It was supposed that the high priest possessed a certain gift of prophecy, and his declaration thus became an oracle full of profound significance to

the Christian community. But such a declaration, whoever he that pronounced it might be, expressed the feeling of the whole sacerdotal party. This party was strongly opposed to popular seditions. It sought to suppress religious enthusiasts, foreseeing, and that rightly, that by their impassioned preaching they would bring about the total ruin of the nation. Although the excitement created by Jesus was in nowise temporal, the priests saw, as the final consequence of the agitation, an aggravation of the Roman yoke and the overthrow of the Temple, the source of their wealth and honours. Certainly the causes which, thirty-seven years later, were to effect the ruin of Jerusalem did not proceed from infant Christianity. They arose in Jerusalem itself, and not in Galilee. It cannot be said, however, that the charge made in this matter by the priests was so groundless that we are necessarily to consider it as insincere. In a general sense, Jesus, had he succeeded, would have really caused the ruin of the Jewish nation. According to principles, universally admitted by all ancient statecraft, Hanan and Kaiapha were thus right in saying: "Better the death of one man than the ruin of a people!" In our opinion such reasoning is detestable. But it has been that of conservative parties from the beginning of all human societies. The "party of order" (I use the expression in its mean and narrow sense) has ever been the same. Considering the highest duty of government to be the prevention of popular commotions, it believes it performs a patriotic act when, by judicial murder, it averts the tumultuous effusion of blood. With little thought of the future, it does not dream that, in declaring war against all innovations, it incurs the risk of crushing the idea that is

one day destined to triumph. The death of Jesus was one of the thousand illustrations of this policy. The movement he led was entirely spiritual, but still it was a movement; hence the men of order, persuaded that the thing essential for humanity is to remain quiet, felt themselves bound to prevent the new spirit from extending. Never was seen a more striking example of how greatly such a procedure defeats its own object. Left free, Jesus would have worn himself out in a desperate struggle with the impossible. The unintelligent hate of his foes decided the success of his work, and sealed his divinity.

The death of Jesus was thus decided in the month of February or the beginning of March. But he still escaped for a short time. He withdrew to an obscure town called Ephraim or Ephron, in the direction of Bethel, a short day's journey from Jerusalem. There he spent a few weeks with his disciples, letting the storm pass over. But orders for his arrest, the moment he appeared at Jerusalem, were given. The feast of the Passover was drawing nigh, and it was thought that Jesus, according to his custom, would come to celebrate it at Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE LAST WEEK OF JESUS.

JESUS in fact set out with his disciples to see once more, and for the last time, the unbelieving city. The hopes of his followers had grown more and more exalted. All believed, in going up to Jerusalem, that the kingdom of God was about to be realised there. The fact of men's impiety being at its height was regarded as a great sign that the consummation was at hand. Their conviction in the matter was such, that they were already disputing for precedence in the kingdom. This was, it is said, the moment chosen by Salome to ask, on behalf of her sons, the two seats on the right and left of the Son of man. The Master, on the other hand, was beset by serious thoughts. Sometimes he permitted a gloomy resentment against his enemies to show itself; he related the parable of a nobleman, who went to take possession of a kingdom in a far country; but no sooner had he departed than his fellow-citizens wished to get rid of him. The king returned, and commanded those who did not wish him to reign over them to be brought before him, and had them all put to death. At other times Jesus summarily destroyed the illusions of the disciples. As they walked along the stony roads to the north of Jerusalem, he pensively preceded the group of



his companions. All gazed on him in silence, with fear in their hearts, not daring to question him. Already, on different occasions, he had spoken to them of his future sufferings, and they had listened to him reluctantly. At last he spoke, and, no longer concealing his presentiments, told them of his approaching end. There was great sorrow in the whole company. The disciples had been expecting to see the sign soon appear in the clouds. The inaugural cry of the kingdom of God: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,"<sup>1</sup> already in joyous accents resounded in their ears. The fearful prospect he unfolded troubled them. At every step of the fatal road the kingdom of God drew nearer or receded farther in the mirage of their dreams. As to Jesus, he grew confirmed in the belief that he was about to die, but that his death would save the world. The misunderstanding between him and his disciples became deeper at every moment.

The custom was to come to Jerusalem several days before the Passover, in order to prepare for it. Jesus arrived late, and for a moment his enemies thought their hope of seizing him was frustrated. On the sixth day before the feast (Saturday, 8th of Nisan, or 28th of March) he at last reached Bethany. He entered, according to his habit, the house of Martha and Mary, or of Simon the leper. He was given a great reception. There was a dinner at Simon the leper's, at which many persons assembled, attracted by the desire of seeing the new prophet, and also, it is said, of seeing the Lazarus of whom for the last few days so many things had been related. It may be that Simon the leper, seated at table, already passed as being the alleged resuscitated man, and attracted attention. Martha waited on

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 35.

the guests according to her custom. Apparently it was sought, by an increased display of respect, to conquer the indifference of the public, and to assert the high dignity of their guest. Mary, in order to make the event more of a festival, entered during dinner, bearing a vase of perfume which she poured upon the feet of Jesus. She then broke the vase in accordance with an old custom of breaking the vessel that had been employed in the entertainment of a stranger of distinction. Then, testifying her worship to unparalleled excess, she prostrated herself at the feet of her Master and wiped them with her long hair. All the house was filled with the sweet odour of the perfume, to the great delight of every one save the avaricious Judas of Kerioth. Considering the thrifty habits of the community, this was certainly prodigality. The greedy treasurer immediately calculated for how much the perfume might have been sold, and what it would have realised for the poor. This not very affectionate feeling, which seemed to place something above Jesus, dissatisfied the latter. He liked to be honoured, for honours served his purpose and strengthened his title of Son of David. . Therefore when they spoke to him of the poor, he replied rather sharply: "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always."<sup>1</sup> And, exalting himself, he promised immortality to the woman who at that critical moment gave him a token of love.

The next day (Sunday, 9th of Nisan) Jesus descended from Bethany to Jerusalem. When, at the bend of the road on the summit of the Mount of Olives, he saw the city lying before him, it is said he wept over it, and addressed to it a last appeal. On the slope of the mountain, near the suburb, chiefly inhabited by priests, which was called *Beth-*

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 11.

*phage*, he felt a momentary human pleasure. His arrival was noised abroad. The Galileans who had come to the feast were highly elated by it, and prepared a little triumph for him. An ass was brought to him, followed, according to custom, by its colt. The Galileans laid their finest clothes upon the back of the humble animal as saddle-cloths, and seated him thereon, while others spread their garments upon the road, and strewed it with green branches. The multitude which preceded and followed him, carrying palms, cried: "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"<sup>1</sup> Some even gave him the title of king of Israel. "Master, rebuke thy disciples," said the Pharisees to him. "I tell you that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out,"<sup>2</sup> answered Jesus, and entered into the city. The Hierosolymites, who scarcely knew him, asked who he was: "It is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, in Galilee," was the reply. Jerusalem was a city of about 50,000 souls. A trifling event, such as the entrance of a stranger, however little celebrated he might be, or the arrival of a band of provincials, or a movement of people to the avenues of the city, could not fail, under ordinary circumstances, to be quickly noised about. But during seasons of festival the confusion was extreme. Jerusalem at such times was given over to strangers; and it was amongst the latter that the excitement appears to have been highest. Some Greek-speaking proselytes who had come to the feast had their curiosity stimulated, and wished to see Jesus. They addressed themselves to his disciples; but the result of the interview is not known. Jesus, as his habit was, went to pass the night at his beloved village of Bethany. On the three

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxi. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xix. 39, 40.

following days (Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday) he regularly descended to Jerusalem, returning after sunset either to Bethany or to the farms on the western side of the Mount of Olives, where he had many friends.

During these last days a deep sadness appears to have filled the soul of Jesus, which was generally so joyous and serene. All the narratives agree in relating that before his arrest he went through a brief phase of misgiving and trouble, a kind of agony in anticipation. According to some, he suddenly exclaimed, "Now is my soul troubled. . . . Father, save me from this hour."<sup>1</sup> It was believed that a voice from heaven was heard at that moment: others said that an angel came to console him. According to one widely-spread version, the incident occurred in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus, it was said, went about a stone's-throw from his sleeping disciples, taking with him only Cephas and the two sons of Zebedee. Then he fell on his face and prayed. His soul was sick even unto death; a terrible anguish weighed him down; but resignation to the divine will sustained him. This scene, by reason of the instinctive art which regulated the compilation of the Synoptics, and often led them to follow rules of adaptability and effect in the arrangement of the narrative, is stated as having happened on the last night of the life of Jesus, and at the moment of his arrest. Were this version the true one, we should scarcely understand why John, who had been the immediate witness of so touching an episode, should not have spoken of it to his disciples, and that the author of the fourth Gospel, in the very circumstantial narrative which he gives of the evening of the Thursday, should have omitted mention of it. All

<sup>1</sup> John xii. 27.

that one can safely say is, that, during his last days, the enormous weight of the mission he had accepted bore cruelly upon Jesus. For a moment human nature asserted itself. It may be that he began to have doubts about his work. Terror and hesitation seized him and cast him into a state of exhaustion worse than death itself. He who has sacrificed his repose and the legitimate rewards of life to a great idea ever experiences a feeling of revulsion when the image of death presents itself for the first time to him, and seeks to persuade him that all has been in vain. Perhaps some of those touching memories preserved by the strongest souls, and at times sharp as a sword, came to him at this moment. Did he remember the clear fountains of Galilee, where he might have found refreshment; the vine and the fig-tree under which he might have rested, the young maidens who perhaps might have consented to love him? Did he curse the cruel destiny which had denied him the joys granted to all others? Did he regret his too lofty nature, and, victim of his greatness, mourn that he had not remained a simple workman in Nazareth? We know not. For all these inward troubles were evidently a sealed chapter to his disciples. They understood nothing of them, and by simple conjectures supplied what in their Master's great soul was obscure to them. It is at least certain that his divine nature soon regained the supremacy. He might still have escaped death; but he would not. Love of his work sustained him. He was willing to drink the cup to its dregs. Henceforth we behold Jesus entirely himself and with his character unclouded. The subtleties of the controversialist, the credulity of the thaumaturgist and exorcist are forgotten. There remains but the incomparable hero of the Passion, the founder of the rights of

free conscience, the complete exemplar whom all suffering souls will contemplate to fortify and to console themselves.

The triumph of Bethphage—the audacity of the provincial folk in celebrating the advent of their Messiah-King at the very gates of Jerusalem—completed the exasperation of the Pharisees and the Temple aristocracy. Another council was held on the Wednesday (12th of Nisan) in the house of Joseph Kaiapha. The immediate arrest of Jesus was resolved upon. A great idea of order and conservative policy governed all their plans. The question was how a scene might be avoided. As the feast of the Passover, which in that year began on the Friday evening, was a time of bustle and excitement, it was resolved to anticipate it. Jesus being popular, they feared an outbreak; the arrest was therefore decided for the next day, Thursday. It was resolved also, not to apprehend him in the Temple, where he came every day, but to observe his habits, that he might be seized in some quiet spot. The agents of the priests sounded his disciples, in the hope of obtaining useful information from their weakness or simplicity. They found what they sought in Judas of Kerioth. This wretch, from motives impossible to explain, betrayed his Master, gave all the necessary information, and even undertook himself (although such an excess of vileness is scarcely credible) to guide the troop which was to effect the arrest. The remembrance of horror which the folly or wickedness of the man has left in Christian tradition must have given rise to some exaggeration on this point. Judas until now had been a disciple like the others; he even had the title of apostle; and he had performed miracles and driven out demons. Legend, which always uses strong and decisive language, describes the occupants of the room in which the

last supper was taken as eleven saints and one reprobate. Reality does not proceed by such absolute categories. Avarice, which the Synoptics give as the motive of the crime in question, does not suffice to explain it. It would be very singular for a man who kept the purse, and knew what he would lose by the death of his chief, to give up the profits of his position in exchange for a very small sum of money. Had the self-love of Judas been wounded by the rebuke he had received at the dinner at Bethany? Even this would not explain his conduct. The fourth evangelist would have us look upon him as a thief, an unbeliever from the first, but for this there is no probability. His action might rather be ascribed to some feeling of jealousy or dissension amongst the disciples. The peculiar hatred towards Judas to be remarked in the Gospel attributed to John confirms this hypothesis. Less pure in heart than the others. Judas, from the nature of his office, must have unconsciously grown narrow-minded. By a habit characteristic of men engaged in active duties, he had come to consider the interests of the treasury as superior even to those of the work which it was intended to serve. The treasurer must have slain the apostle. The murmurs which escaped him at Bethany seem to imply that occasionally he thought the Master cost his spiritual family too dear. No doubt this petty economy of his had at many other times caused friction in the little community.

Without denying that Judas of Kerioth may have helped to bring about the arrest of his Master, we still believe that the curses heaped upon him are somewhat unjust. In his action there was perhaps more awkwardness than perversity. The moral conscience of the man of the people is quick and correct, but unstable and inconsistent. It is unable to

resist the impulse of the moment. The secret societies of the republican party had within them much earnestness and sincerity, and yet informers were very numerous among them. A trifling spite sufficed to turn a partisan into a traitor. But if foolish desire for a few pieces of silver turned the head of poor Judas, he does not appear to have lost moral feeling altogether, since, when he had seen the consequences of his sin, he repented, and, it is said, killed himself.

Each moment of this period is solemn, and counts more than whole ages in the history of humanity. We have arrived at Thursday, 13th of Nisan (2nd of April). On the evening of the next day the festival of the Passover began with the feast in which the Paschal lamb was eaten. The festival continued for seven days, during which unleavened bread was eaten. The first and the last of these seven days were peculiarly solemn in character. The disciples were already engaged in preparing for the feast. As to Jesus, there is reason to believe that he was aware of the treachery of Judas, and suspected the fate that awaited him. In the evening he took his last repast with his disciples. It was not the ritual feast of the Passover, as was afterwards supposed, owing to an error of a day in reckoning, but for the primitive Church this supper of the Thursday was the true Passover, the seal of the new covenant. Every disciple attached his dearest memories to it; and numerous touching traits of the Master which each one preserved were associated with this repast, which became the corner-stone of Christian piety, and the starting-point of its most fruitful institutions.

There can be no doubt indeed that the tender love which filled the heart of Jesus for the little Church



around him overflowed at this moment. His strong and serene soul grew light, even under the weight of the gloomy forebodings which beset him. He had a word for each of his friends; two of them especially, John and Peter, were the objects of tender marks of attachment. John was reclining on the divan by the side of Jesus, with his head resting upon the Master's breast. Towards the close of the repast, the secret which weighed upon the heart of Jesus almost escaped him: he said, "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."<sup>1</sup> To these simple men it was a moment of anguish; they looked upon one another, and each questioned himself. Judas was present; possibly Jesus, who for some time had had reason to suspect him, sought by this remark to elicit from his looks or his embarrassed manner a confession of his sin. But the treacherous disciple did not lose countenance; he even dared, it is said, to ask with the others: "Is it I, Rabbi?"

Meanwhile Peter's good and upright soul was in torment. With a sign he prompted John to endeavour to ascertain of whom the Master was speaking. John, who could converse with Jesus without being overheard, asked him the meaning of the enigma. Jesus having only suspicions, did not wish to give any name; he only told John to watch well him to whom he was going to offer a piece of bread dipped in the sauce. At the same time he soaked the bread and offered it to Judas. John and Peter alone had cognizance of the fact. Jesus addressed to Judas a few words which contained a bitter reproach, but were not understood by those present. They thought that Jesus was simply giving him orders for the morrow's feast, and he went out.

At the time, this repast did not impress any one; and,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 21.

apart from the apprehensions confided by the Master to his disciples, who only half understood them, nothing extraordinary happened. But after the death of Jesus a singularly solemn significance was attached to this evening, and the imagination of believers clad it with a colouring of sweet mysticism. The last hours of a dear friend are those we best remember. By an inevitable illusion, we attribute to the conversations we have then had with him a meaning which only death gives them; into a few hours we concentrate the memories of many years. The majority of the disciples saw their Master no more after the supper of which we have just spoken. It was the farewell banquet. At this meal, as at many others, Jesus practised his mysterious rite of the breaking of bread. As it was an early belief in the Church that the repast in question took place on the day of the Passover, and was the Paschal feast, the idea was naturally conceived that the Eucharistic institution was founded at this supreme moment. Starting from the hypothesis that Jesus knew beforehand the precise moment of his death, the disciples were necessarily led to suppose that he reserved a number of important acts for his last hours. As moreover one of the fundamental ideas of the first Christians was that the death of Jesus had been a sacrifice, superseding all those of the ancient Law, the "Last Supper," which was supposed to have taken place once for all on the eve of the Passion, became the one supreme sacrifice—the act which constituted the new covenant—the sign of the blood shed for the salvation of all men. The bread and wine, brought into relation with death itself, were thus the image of the new Testament sealed by Jesus with his sufferings—the commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ until his advent.

At a very early date this mystery was embodied in a small sacramental narrative, which we possess under four forms with a strong mutual resemblance. The fourth evangelist, preoccupied with Eucharistic ideas, who relates the Last Supper with so much prolixity, connecting with it so many incidents and discourses, is not acquainted with this narrative. This is a proof that in the sect whose tradition he represents the Eucharistic institution was not regarded as a special feature of the Lord's Supper. For the fourth evangelist the rite of the Last Supper is the washing of feet. It is probable that in certain primitive Christian families this latter rite obtained an importance which it has since lost. No doubt Jesus had on some occasions practised it to give his disciples a lesson in brotherly humility. It was connected with the eve of his death, by reason of the tendency to group round the Last Supper all the great moral and ritual recommendations of Jesus.

A lofty feeling of love, of concord, of charity, and of mutual deference animated moreover the memories which were cherished of the last hours of Jesus. It is always the unity of his Church, constituted by him or by his Spirit, which is the soul of the symbols and discourses attributed by Christian tradition to these hallowed moments. "A new commandment I give unto you," said he, "that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."<sup>1</sup> Even at this last moment some rivalries and struggles for precedence arose. Jesus remarked that if he, the Master, had been in the midst of his disciples as their servant, how much more ought they to submit themselves one to another. According to some,

<sup>1</sup> John xiii. 34, 35.

in drinking the wine, he said, "I will not drink from henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."<sup>1</sup> According to others, he promised them soon a heavenly feast, where they would be seated on thrones by his side.

It seems as though, towards the end of the evening, the forebodings of Jesus took possession of the disciples also. All felt that a grave peril threatened the Master, and that a crisis was at hand. For a moment Jesus thought of precautions, and spoke of swords. There were two in the company. "It is enough," said he. He did not follow this idea out however, seeing clearly that timid provincials would not stand before the armed force of the great powers of Jerusalem. Cephas, full of enthusiasm, and feeling sure of himself, swore that he would go with him to prison and to death. Jesus, with his usual acuteness, expressed doubts about him. According to a tradition, which probably proceeded from Peter himself, Jesus declared that Peter would be found wanting before the crowing of the cock. All, like Cephas, vowed that they would not fail him.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 29.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE ARREST AND TRIAL OF JESUS.

NIGHT had fallen when they left the room. Jesus, as was his custom, passed through the valley of Kedron; and, accompanied by his disciples, went into the garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, where he sat down. Overawing his friends by his majesty, he watched and prayed. They were sleeping near him, when suddenly an armed troop appeared carrying lighted torches. It was the guards of the Temple, armed with staves, a kind of police force which the priests had been allowed to maintain. They were supported by a detachment of Roman soldiers with their swords. The warrant of arrest emanated from the high priest and the Sanhedrim. Judas, knowing the habits of Jesus, had pointed out this place as being that where he might be most easily surprised, and, according to the unanimous tradition of the earliest times, himself accompanied the detachment. By some accounts he carried his hateful conduct so far as to make a kiss the sign of his betrayal. However this may be, it is certain that there was some attempt at resistance on the part of the disciples. Peter, it is said, drew his sword, and wounded the ear of Malchus, one of the servants of the high priest. Jesus made this opposition cease, and

gave himself up to the soldiers. Weak and incapable of effective resistance, especially against authorities with so much prestige, the disciples took to flight and dispersed; Peter and John alone did not lose sight of their Master. Another young man—perhaps Mark—followed him, covered with a light garment. It was sought to arrest him, but the young man fled, leaving his tunic in the hands of the officers.

The course which the priests had determined to take against Jesus was in perfect conformity with the established law. The procedure against the “corrupter” (*mésith*) who seeks to corrupt purity of religion is explained in the Talmud, with details, the naïve impudence of which provokes a smile. A judicial ambush is laid down as an essential part of the criminal’s examination. When a man was accused of being a “corrupter,” two witnesses were suborned who were hidden behind a partition; and it was then arranged that the accused should be brought into an adjoining room, where he could be heard by these two witnesses without his perceiving them. Two candles were lighted near him, so that it might be conclusively proved that the witnesses “saw him.” He was then forced to repeat his blasphemy, and urged to retract it. If he persisted in it, the witnesses who had heard him took him to the tribunal, and he was stoned to death. The Talmud adds that Jesus was treated in this way; that he was condemned on the testimony of two witnesses who had been suborned, and that the crime of “corruption” is moreover the only one for which witnesses are thus prepared.

We learn indeed from the disciples of Jesus that the crime with which their Master was charged was that of “corruption”; and, apart from some trifling details, fruits

of the rabbinical imagination, the Gospel narrative exactly corresponds with the procedure described in the Talmud. The scheme of the enemies of Jesus was to convict him, by the testimony of witnesses and by his own avowals, of blasphemy and outrage on the Mosaic religion, to condemn him to death according to law, and then to have the sentence confirmed by Pilate. The whole sacerdotal authority, as we have already seen, was practically in the hands of Hanan. The warrant of arrest probably came from him. It was before this powerful man that Jesus was brought in the first instance. Hanan examined him as to his doctrine and his disciples. Jesus, with just pride, declined to enter into long explanations. He referred Hanan to his teachings, which had been public; he declared that he had never held any secret doctrine; and he asked the ex-high priest to question those who had listened to him. This response was perfectly natural; but the exaggerated respect with which the old priest was surrounded made it seem audacious, and one of the bystanders is said to have replied to it by a blow.

Peter and John had followed their Master to the abode of Hanan. John, who was known in the house, was admitted without difficulty; but Peter was stopped at the entrance, and John had to beg the porter to let him pass through. The night was cold. Peter remained in the antechamber, and approached a brasier, round which the servants were warming themselves. He was quickly recognised as a disciple of the accused. The unfortunate man, betrayed by his Galilean accent, and pestered with questions by the servants, one of whom, a kinsman of Malchus, had seen him at Ge'hsemane, thrice denied that he had ever had anything to do with Jesus. He thought that Jesus

could not hear him, and never imagined that this dissimulated cowardice was exceedingly dishonourable. But his better nature soon revealed to him the sin he had committed. A fortuitous circumstance, the crowing of the cock, recalled to him a remark that Jesus had made. Touched in heart, he went out and wept bitterly.

Hanan, although the real author of the judicial murder about to be done, had no power to pronounce sentence on Jesus; he sent him to his son-in-law, Kaiapha, who bore the official title. This man, the blind instrument of his father-in-law, naturally had to ratify all that had been done. The Sanhedrim was assembled at his house. The inquiry began; and several witnesses, prepared beforehand in accordance with the inquisitorial process described in the Talmud, appeared before the tribunal. The fatal words which Jesus had actually uttered: "I am able to destroy the Temple of God and to build it in three days,"<sup>1</sup> were reported by two witnesses. To blaspheme the Temple of God was, in Jewish law, to blaspheme God himself. Jesus remained silent, and declined to explain the incriminating speech. If one version is to be believed, the high priest then adjured him to say if he were the Messiah; Jesus avowed it, and even proclaimed before the assembly the near approach of his heavenly reign. The courage of Jesus in his resolve to die renders this statement superfluous. It is more probable that here, as when before Hanan, he kept silence. This was his general rule of conduct during his last hours. The sentence was already decided, and they only sought for pretexts. Jesus felt this, and did not attempt a useless defence. From the point of view of orthodox Judaism, he truly was a

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 61.



blasphemer, a destroyer of the established worship; and these crimes were punished by the law with death. With one voice, the assembly declared him guilty of a capital crime. The members of the council who secretly leaned to him were absent or refrained from voting. The frivolity, characteristic of long-established aristocracies, did not permit the judges to reflect much on the consequences of the sentence they had passed. Human life was at that time very lightly sacrificed; doubtless the members of the Sanhedrim did not dream that their sons would have to render account to an enraged posterity for the condemnation delivered with such careless disdain.

The Sanhedrim had not the right to carry out a sentence of death. But in the confusion of powers which then reigned in Judæa, Jesus was none the less condemned from that moment. He remained for the rest of the night exposed to the ill-treatment of an infamous pack of servants, who spared him no indignity.

In the morning the chief priests and the elders met once more. The point was to get Pilate to ratify the sentence pronounced by the Sanhedrim, which, since the Roman occupation, was no longer sufficient. The procurator was not invested, like the imperial legate, with the disposal of life and death. But Jesus was not a Roman citizen; the governor's authorisation sufficed for the sentence passed on him being allowed to take its course. As always happens, when a political people subdues a nation in which the civil and the religious law are confounded, the Romans had been induced to lend the Jewish law a kind of official support. The Roman law did not apply to Jews. The latter remained under the canonical law which we find recorded in the Talmud, just as the Arabs in Algeria are

still governed by the code of Islam. Thus, although neutral in religion, the Romans very often sanctioned penalties inflicted for religious offences. The situation was almost like that of the holy cities of India under English rule, or rather that which would be the state of Damascus, were Syria conquered by a European nation. Josephus asserts, though his statement may certainly be doubted, that if a Roman trespassed beyond the pillars which bore inscriptions forbidding pagans to go further, the Romans themselves would have delivered him over to the Jews to be put to death.

The agents of the priests therefore bound Jesus and led him to the Prætorium, which had once been the palace of Herod, near the Tower of Antonia. It was the morning of the day on which the Paschal lamb had to be eaten (Friday, the 14th of Nisan, our 3rd of April). The Jews would have been defiled by entering the judgment-hall, and would have been unable to share in the sacred feast. They accordingly remained outside. Pilate, being informed of their presence, ascended the *bima*, or tribunal, situated in the open air, at the place called *Gabbatha*, or in Greek, *Lithostrotos*, on account of the pavement which covered the ground.

He had scarcely been informed of the accusation before he showed his annoyance at being mixed up in the matter. He then shut himself up in the Prætorium with Jesus. There a conversation took place, the precise details of which are lost, no witness having been able to report it to the disciples, but the tenor of which seems to have been well divined by the fourth evangelist. His narrative at least is in perfect accordance with what history tells us of the mutual position of the two interlocutors.

The procurator Pontius, surnamed Pilate, no doubt because of the *pilum*, or javelin of honour, with which he or one of his ancestors was decorated, had not hitherto been in contact with the new sect. Indifferent to the internal quarrels of the Jews, he saw in all these sectarian movements nothing but the results of intemperate imaginations and disordered brains. In general he did not like the Jews, but the Jews detested him still more. They considered him hard, scornful, and passionate, and accused him of improbable crimes. Jerusalem, as the centre of a great popular fermentation, was a very seditious city, and, for a foreigner, an insupportable place of abode. The enthusiasts asserted that the new procurator had a deliberate design of abolishing the Jewish law. Their narrow fanaticism and their religious hatred disgusted that wide feeling of justice and civil government which the most ordinary Roman citizen carried everywhere with him. All the acts of Pilate known to us exhibit him as a good administrator. At an early period of the exercise of his office he had had difficulties with those under his sway, which he had solved in a very brutal manner; but it seems that essentially he was in the right. The Jews must have appeared to him to be a people behind the age; probably he judged them as a liberal prefect formerly judged the Bas-Bretons, who rebelled because of a new road, or the establishment of a school. In his best projects for the welfare of the country, notably in all relating to public works, he had encountered an impassable obstacle in the Law. The Law restricted life to such a point that it obstructed all change and all improvements. The Roman structures, even those most useful, were objects of great antipathy to zealous Jews. Two votive escutcheons with inscriptions, which Pilate had placed on his residence

near the sacred precincts, provoked a still more violent outburst. At first he paid little attention to these susceptibilities; and he was soon involved in sanguinary suppressions of revolt, which later ended in his removal. Experience of so many conflicts had rendered him very prudent in his relations with an intractable people, which avenged itself upon its masters by compelling them to use towards it hateful severities. With extreme displeasure the procurator saw himself led to play a cruel part in this new affair, for the sake of a law which he detested. He knew that religious fanaticism, when it has obtained the sanction of civil governments to some act of violence, is afterwards the first to throw the responsibility upon them, and almost accuses them of bringing it about. Supreme injustice, for the true culprit in such cases is the instigator!

Pilate then would have liked to save Jesus. Perhaps the dignified and calm attitude of the accused made an impression upon him. According to one tradition, of little authenticity indeed, Jesus found a supporter in the wife of the procurator himself, who asserted that she had had a painful dream about him. She may have seen the gentle Galilean from one of the palace windows overlooking the courts of the Temple. Perhaps she saw him again in her dreams; and the idea that the blood of this fine-looking young man was about to be spilt caused a nightmare. It is certain at least that Jesus found Pilate prepossessed in his favour. The governor questioned him kindly, and with the intention of finding some means of sending him away acquitted.

The title of "King of the Jews," which Jesus had never assumed, but which his enemies represented as the sum and substance of his line of actions and pretensions, was naturally

that by which it was most possible to excite the suspicions of the Roman authorities. He was accordingly charged on this plea of sedition and treason against the government. Nothing could be more unjust; for Jesus had always recognised the Roman government as the established power. But conservative religious parties are not accustomed to shrink from calumny. In spite of his own explanation, they drew all kinds of conclusions from his teaching; they transformed him into a disciple of Judas the Gaulonite; they asserted that he forbade the payment of tribute to Cæsar. Pilate asked him if he were really the King of the Jews. Jesus concealed none of his thoughts. But the great ambiguity of speech which had been the source of his strength, and was destined after his death to establish his kingship, was in this matter his ruin. As an idealist, that is to say, as one who did not distinguish spirit from substance, Jesus, whose words, to use the image of the Apocalypse, were as a two-edged sword, never completely satisfied earthly powers. If we are to believe the fourth Gospel, he avowed his kingship, but uttered at the same time the profound saying: "My kingdom is not of this world."<sup>1</sup> Then he explained the nature of his kingship, declaring that it consisted entirely in the possession and the proclamation of truth. Pilate understood nothing of this lofty idealism. No doubt Jesus impressed him as being a harmless dreamer. The total absence of religious and philosophical proselytism among the Romans of the period made them regard devotion to truth as a chimera. Such discussions bored them and appeared meaningless. Not perceiving the leaven of peril to the Empire that lay hidden in these new speculations, they had no motive for

<sup>1</sup> John xviii. 36.

employing violence against them. All their displeasure fell upon those who asked them to inflict punishments for what seemed to them vain subtleties. Twenty years later, Gallio still adopted the same course towards the Jews. Until the fall of Jerusalem, the practice followed by the Romans in their administration was to remain completely neutral in sectarian quarrels.

An expedient suggested itself to the governor's mind, by which he could reconcile his own feelings with the demands of the fanatical people, whose pressure he had felt so often already. It was customary to deliver up a prisoner to the people at the time of the Passover. Pilate, aware that Jesus had only been arrested because of the jealousy of the priests, endeavoured to make him benefit by this custom. He again appeared on the *bima*, and proposed to the multitude to release the "King of the Jews." The proposition made in these terms was characterised by a certain liberality, as well as being ironical. The priests saw its danger. They acted promptly, and, to combat Pilate's proposal, they suggested to the crowd the name of a prisoner who enjoyed great popularity in Jerusalem. By a singular coincidence, he too was called Jesus, and bore the surname of Bar-Abba, or Bar-Rabban. He was a notorious character, and had been arrested for taking part in a riot in which murder had been done. A general clamour arose, "Not this man, but Jesus Bar-Rabban;" and Pilate was obliged to release Jesus Bar-Rabban.

His embarrassment increased. He feared that too much indulgence shown to a prisoner, to whom was given the title of "King of the Jews," might compromise himself. Fanaticism, moreover, compels all powers to make terms with it. Pilate thought himself forced to make some concession; but, still

hesitating to shed blood to satisfy people whom he hated, he tried to turn the matter into a farce. Affecting to laugh at the pompous title that had been given to Jesus, he caused him to be scourged. Scourging was the usual preliminary of crucifixion. Perhaps Pilate wished it to be believed that this sentence had already been pronounced, and hoped that the preliminary punishment would suffice. Then took place—according to all the narratives—a revolting scene. The soldiers put a scarlet robe on the back of Jesus, a crown made of thorn branches upon his head, and a reed in his hand. Thus attired he was led to the tribunal in front of the people. The soldiers defiled before him, striking him in turn, and knelt to him, saying, "Hail! King of the Jews." Others, it is said, spat upon him, and struck him on the head with the reed. It is difficult to understand how Roman dignity could have stooped to acts so shameful. It is true that Pilate, in his position as procurator, had scarcely any but auxiliary troops under his command. Roman citizens, as the legionaries were, would not have descended to such behaviour.

Did Pilate believe that by this display he shielded himself from responsibility? Did he hope to turn aside the blow which menaced Jesus by conceding something to the hatred of the Jews, and by substituting a grotesque termination for the tragic consummation, to make it appear that the matter merited no other issue? If such were his plan it was unsuccessful. The tumult increased, and became an actual riot. The cry, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" resounded from every side. The priests, adopting a more and more exacting tone, declared the Law would be imperilled if the corrupter were not punished with death. Pilate saw plainly that to save Jesus it would be necessary

to put down a sanguinary outbreak. He still tried, however, to gain time. He returned to the Prætorium, and ascertained from what country Jesus came in the hope of finding some pretext for asserting the matter to be out of his jurisdiction. According to one tradition, he even sent Jesus to Antipas, who, it is said, was then at Jerusalem. Jesus took no part in these well-meant efforts; he kept, as he had done before Kaiapha, a grave and dignified silence which astonished Pilate. The cries from without became more and more threatening. The people had already begun to denounce the lack of zeal in a functionary who protected an enemy of Cæsar. The greatest foes of the Roman rule were suddenly transformed into loyal subjects of Tiberius, that they might have the right of accusing the over-tolerant procurator of high treason. "We have no king," cried they, "but Cæsar. If thou release this man, thou art not Cæsar's friend: every one that maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar."<sup>1</sup> The feeble Pilate surrendered; he foresaw the report that his enemies would send to Rome, in which he would be accused of having protected a rival of Tiberius. Once before, in the question of the votive escutcheons, the Jews had written to the Emperor, and had received satisfaction. He feared for his office. By a compliance, which was to deliver his name to the scourge of history, he yielded, throwing upon the Jews, it is said, the whole responsibility for what was about to take place. The latter, according to the Christians, fully accepted it, by shouting, "His blood be on us and on our children!"<sup>2</sup>

Were these words really uttered? It may be doubted. But they express a profound historical truth. Considering

<sup>1</sup> John xix. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxvii. 25.



the attitude which the Romans had taken in Judæa, it was scarcely possible for Pilate to have acted otherwise than as he did. How many death sentences, dictated by religious intolerance, have forced the hand of the civil power! The King of Spain, who, to please a fanatical clergy, delivered hundreds of his subjects to the stake, was more open to reproach than Pilate, for he represented a more absolute power than that of the Romans in Jerusalem about the year 33. When the civil power begins to persecute or meddle at the solicitation of the priesthood, it proves its weakness. But let the government that in this respect is without sin cast the first stone at Pilate. The "secular arm," behind which clerical cruelty shields itself, is not the culprit. None has a right to say that he has a horror of blood when he causes it to be shed by his servants.

It was then neither Tiberius nor Pilate who condemned Jesus. It was the old Jewish party; it was the Mosaic Law. According to our modern ideas, there is no transmission of moral demerit from father to son; none is accountable to human or divine justice save for what himself has done. Consequently, every Jew who suffers to this day for the murder of Jesus has a right to complain, for he might have been like Simon the Cyrenean; at any rate, he might not have been among those who cried "Crucify him!" But nations, like individuals, have their responsibilities, and if ever a crime was a national crime, it was the death of Jesus. His death was "legal" in the sense that it was primarily caused by a law that was the very soul of the nation. The Mosaic Law, in its modern, but still in its accepted form, assigned the penalty of death to all attempts to change the established worship. Now, there can be no doubt that Jesus attacked this

worship, and aspired to destroy it. The Jews expressed this to Pilate, with truthful simplicity: "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die; because he has made himself the Son of God."<sup>1</sup> The law was detestable, but it was the law of ancient ferocity; and the hero, who came forward to abrogate it, had first of all to suffer its penalty.

Alas! more than eighteen hundred years have been necessary for the blood that he shed to bear its fruits. Tortures and death were for ages destined to be inflicted in the name of Jesus, on thinkers as noble as himself. Even now in countries which call themselves Christian, penalties are imposed for religious offences. Jesus is not responsible for these errors. He could not foresee that one day people, with depraved imaginations, would think of him as a frightful Moloch, greedy of burnt flesh. Christianity has been intolerant, but there is nothing essentially Christian in intolerance. It is a Jewish characteristic, in the sense that it was Judaism which first affirmed the theory of absolutism in religion, and laid down the principle that every reformer turning men away from the true faith, even if he bring miracles to support his doctrine, must be stoned without trial. Certainly the pagan nations also had their religious violences. But if they had had this law, how would they have become Christian? The Pentateuch has thus been the first code of religious terrorism in the world. Judaism has given the example of an immutable dogma armed with the sword. If, in place of pursuing the Jews with a blind hatred, Christianity had abolished the *régime* which caused the death of its founder, how much more consistent would it have been—how much better it would have deserved of the human race!

<sup>1</sup> John xix. 7.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE DEATH OF JESUS.

ALTHOUGH the real motive for the death of Jesus was entirely a religious one, his enemies had, in the judgment hall, succeeded in representing him as being guilty of treason against the State; they would not have obtained from the sceptical Pilate a condemnation simply on the ground of heterodoxy. Following up the idea, the priests demanded, through the people, the crucifixion of Jesus. This punishment was not Jewish in its origin; had the condemnation of Jesus been purely Mosaic, he would have been stoned to death. Crucifixion was a Roman punishment, reserved for slaves, and for cases in which it was desired to aggravate death by making it ignominious. By inflicting it on Jesus, they treated him as they treated highway robbers, brigands, bandits, or those enemies of humble rank to whom the Romans did not grant the honour of death by the sword. It was the chimerical "King of the Jews," not the heterodox dogmatist, who was punished. Consistently with the same idea, the execution was left to the Romans. At this epoch, amongst the Romans, the soldiers, at least in the case of political condemnations, performed the duties of executioners. Jesus was therefore delivered to a cohort of auxiliary troops, and all the most hateful characteristics

of executions introduced by the cruel customs of the new conquerors were used in his case. It was about noon. They re-clothed him with the garments which they had removed for the scene at the tribunal, and as the cohort already had in reserve two thieves who were to be executed, the three condemned men were put together, and the procession set out for the scene of the execution.

This was at a place called Golgotha, situated outside Jerusalem, but near the walls of the city. The name *Golgotha* signifies a *skull*; it apparently corresponds with the French word *Chaumont*, and probably designated a bare hill or rising ground having the form of a bald skull. The situation of the hill is not precisely known. It was certainly on the north or north-west of the city, in the high irregular plain which extends between the walls and the two valleys of Kedron and Hinnom, a rather commonplace region, made still more dismal by the objectionable circumstances usual in the neighbourhood of a great city. There is no reason for identifying Golgotha with the place which, since the time of Constantine, has been venerated by all Christendom. But, at the same time, there is no such overwhelming objection to this theory as to make it necessary to criticise Christian traditions on the matter.

Any one who was condemned to the cross had himself to carry the instrument of his execution. But Jesus, being physically weaker than his two companions, could not carry his. The troop met a certain Simon of Cyrene, who was returning from the country, and the soldiers, in the rough fashion of foreign garrisons, forced him to bear the fatal tree. Perhaps they made use of a recognised right to compel labour, the Romans not being allowed to carry the infamous wood themselves. It appears that Simon was afterwards of

the Christian community. His two sons, Alexander and Rufus, were well known in it. He related perhaps more than one circumstance which he had witnessed. No disciple was at this moment near Jesus.

At last the place of execution was reached. According to Jewish custom, the sufferers were offered a strong aromatic wine, an intoxicating beverage which, by a feeling of pity, was given to the condemned to stupefy them. It appears that the ladies of Jerusalem frequently brought this death wine to the unfortunates who were led to execution; and when none of them attended, it was purchased by the public treasury. Jesus, after having touched the edge of the cup with his lips, refused to drink. This mournful anodyne of ordinary sufferers did not accord with his exalted nature. He preferred to go from life with perfect clarity of mind, and in full consciousness to await the death he had willed and called down upon himself. He was then stripped of his garments and fastened to the cross. The cross was composed of two beams, tied in the form of the letter T. It was not very high, for the feet of the sufferer almost touched the earth. They commenced by fixing it, then they fastened the victim to it by driving nails into his hands; the feet were often nailed, though sometimes only bound with cords. A piece of wood like a ship's yard was fastened to the upright portion of the cross, towards the middle, and passed between the legs of the condemned, who rested upon it. Without this, the hands would have been torn and the body have sunk down. At other times a small horizontal rest was fixed beneath the feet, and held them up.

Jesus tasted these horrors in all their atrocity. The two robbers were crucified on either side of him. The

executioners, to whom were usually left the small effects (*pannicularia*) of executed felons, drew lots for his garments, and sitting at the foot of the cross, kept watch over him. According to one tradition, Jesus uttered this saying, which was in his heart if not upon his lips: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."<sup>1</sup>

According to Roman custom, an inscription was attached to the top of the cross, bearing, in three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the words: "THE KING OF THE JEWS." There was something painful and insulting to the nation in this inscription. The numerous passers-by who read it were offended. The priests complained to Pilate that an inscription which would have simply implied that Jesus had called himself King of the Jews should have been used. But Pilate, already tired of the whole affair, declined to make any change in what had been written.

The disciples had fled. Nevertheless a tradition relates that John remained standing at the foot of the cross during the whole time. It may be affirmed, with more certainty, that the faithful women friends of Galilee, who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem and continued to tend him, did not abandon him. Mary Cleophas, Mary Magdalen, Joanna wife of Khouza, Salome, and others stayed at a certain distance, and did not take their eyes from him. If the fourth Gospel is to be believed, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also at the foot of the cross, and Jesus seeing his mother and his beloved disciple together, said to the one, "Behold thy mother!" and to the other, "Behold thy son!" But we do not understand how the synoptic evangelists, who name the other women, should have omitted her whose presence was so striking a feature.

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 34.

Perhaps indeed the extreme loftiness of the character of Jesus does not render such personal emotion probable at the moment when, solely possessed with thoughts of his work, he no longer existed save for humanity.

Apart from this little group of women, the sight of whom afar off consoled him, Jesus had before him only a spectacle of human baseness or stupidity. The passers-by insulted him. Round about him he heard foolish raillery, his supreme cries of agony were turned into hateful jests: "He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God." "He saved others," they said again; "himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him! Thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself."<sup>1</sup> Some who had a vague acquaintance with his apocalyptic ideas thought they heard him call upon Elias, and said, "Let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him."<sup>2</sup> It would seem that the two crucified thieves at his side also insulted him. The sky was dark; and the surrounding country, as throughout the environs of Jerusalem, barren and dismal. For a moment, according to certain narratives, his heart failed him; a cloud hid from him the face of his Father; he endured an agony of despair more acute a thousand times than all his torments. He saw nothing but the ingratitude of men; he perhaps repented his suffering for a vile race, and he cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"<sup>3</sup> But his divine instinct again sustained him. In measure as the life of the body flickered out, his soul grew serene, and by degrees returned to its heavenly source. He

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvii. 40-43.

<sup>2</sup> Matt xxvii. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxvii. 46.

regained the idea of his mission; in his death he saw the salvation of the world; the hideous spectacle spread at his feet, melted from his sight, and, profoundly united to his Father, he began upon the gibbet the divine life which he was to live in the heart of humanity through infinite ages.

The peculiar atrocity of crucifixion was that in this horrible condition it was possible to live three or four days upon the instrument of torture. The hæmorrhage from the hands soon ceased and was not mortal. The real cause of death was the unnatural position of the body, which produced a fearful disturbance of the circulation, terrible pains in the head and heart, and, finally, paralysis of the limbs. Those who had a strong constitution could sleep and only died of hunger. The motive idea of this cruel punishment was not to kill the victim directly by positive injuries, but to expose the slave, nailed by the hands of which he had not known how to make good use, and to leave him to rot on the wood. The delicate organisation of Jesus preserved him from this slow agony. A burning thirst, one of the tortures of crucifixion, as of all punishments causing an abundant hæmorrhage, devoured him, and he asked to drink. There was standing near a jar of the ordinary beverage of Roman soldiers, a mixture of vinegar and water called *posca*. The soldiers had to carry their *posca* with them on all their expeditions, in which executions were included. A soldier dipped a sponge in this liquor, put it on the end of a reed, and raised it to the lips of Jesus, who sucked it. There is a theory in the East that allowing crucified or empaled victims to drink accelerates death; many believed that Jesus rendered up his spirit directly he had drunk the



vinegar. It is much more probable that an apoplectic stroke or the instantaneous rupture of a blood-vessel in the heart caused his sudden death at the end of three hours. Some moments before giving up his soul his voice was still strong. Of a sudden he uttered a terrible cry, heard by some as: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!"<sup>1</sup> but by others, more preoccupied with the accomplishment of prophecies, rendered in the words, "It is finished!"<sup>2</sup> His head fell upon his breast, and he expired.

Rest now in thy glory, noble pioneer! Thy work is achieved, thy divinity established. Fear no more to see the edifice of thine efforts crumble through a flaw. Henceforth, beyond the reach of frailty, thou shalt behold, from the heights of heavenly peace, the infinite consequences of thy deeds. At the price of a few hours of suffering, which have not even touched thy mighty soul, thou hast purchased the fullest immortality. For thousands of years the world will depend upon thee! Banner of our contradictions, thou shalt be the sign around which the fiercest battle shall be waged. A thousand times more alive, a thousand times more loved since thy death than during the days of thy pilgrimage here below, thou shalt become so truly the corner-stone of humanity, that to tear thy name from this world were to shake it to its foundations. Betwixt thee and God men shall distinguish no more. Thou that hast utterly vanquished death, take possession of thy kingdom, whither, by the royal road which thou hast shown, ages of worshippers shall follow thee.

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 46.

<sup>2</sup> John xix. 30.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## JESUS IN THE TOMB.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, according to our manner of reckoning time, when Jesus expired. There was a Jewish law against a corpse being allowed to remain hanging on the cross after the evening of the day of execution. It is not probable that this rule was observed in executions carried out by the Romans, but as the next day was the Sabbath, and a Sabbath of peculiar solemnity, the Jews expressed to the Roman authorities their desire that the holy day should not be profaned by such a spectacle. Their request was granted; orders were given to hasten the death of the three victims, and to remove them from the cross. The soldiers obeyed these instructions by inflicting on the two thieves a second punishment much more speedy than that of the cross, the *crurifragium*, or breaking of the legs, the usual punishment for slaves and prisoners of war. As to Jesus, they found that he was dead, and did not think it necessary to break his legs. But one of them, to remove all doubt as to the actual death of the third victim, and to complete it, if any breath remained in him, pierced his side with a spear. They thought they saw water and blood flow from the wound, which was regarded as a sign that life had ceased.

The fourth evangelist, who makes John an actual witness of the affair, insists strongly on this circumstance. It is evident indeed that doubts arose as to the reality of the death of Jesus. A few hours' suspension on the cross appeared to persons in the habit of seeing crucifixions quite insufficient to bring about such a result. They quoted many instances of crucified persons, who, having been removed in time, had been restored to life by powerful remedies. Origen, at a later date, thought it necessary to invoke miracle in order to explain so sudden an end. The same surprise is to be found in the narrative of Mark. In truth, the best guarantee possessed by the historian on a point of this nature is the suspicious hatred of the enemies of Jesus. It is doubtful whether the Jews were at that time filled with apprehension that Jesus might pass for resuscitated; but, in any case, they must have taken care that he was really dead. Whatever, at certain periods, may have been the negligence of the ancients in everything relating to legal proof and the strict conduct of affairs, we cannot but believe that those interested in this case took precautions in a matter of such importance to them.

According to Roman custom, the corpse of Jesus ought to have remained hanging on the cross to become the prey of birds. According to Jewish law, it would have been removed in the evening, and laid in the place of infamy set apart for the burial of those who were executed. Had Jesus had for his disciples only poor Galileans, who were timid and without influence, the latter course would have been taken. But we have seen that, despite his lack of success at Jerusalem, he had gained the sympathy of some important persons who looked forward to the kingdom of God; and these, without avowing themselves his disciples,

were strongly attached to him. One of these persons, Joseph, of the small town of Arimathea (Haramathaim), went in the evening to ask the body from the procurator. Joseph was a rich and honourable man and a member of the Sanhedrim. The Roman law moreover at this period enacted that the body of the person executed should be delivered over to any one who claimed it. Pilate, who was ignorant of what had occurred at the *crurifragium*, was astonished that Jesus should be so soon dead, and summoned the centurion who had superintended the execution, in order to learn how this was; but, after having received the centurion's assurances, he granted Joseph the object of his request. Probably the body had already been taken down from the cross. It was delivered to Joseph, that he might do with it as he pleased.

Another secret friend, Nicodemus, whom we have already seen using his influence in favour of Jesus, came forward at this moment. He arrived bearing an ample provision of the materials necessary for embalming. Joseph and Nicodemus interred Jesus according to Jewish custom—that is to say, by wrapping him in a sheet with myrrh and aloes. The Galilean women were present, and no doubt took part in the proceedings with bitter cries and tears.

It was late, and all this was done in great haste. The place in which the body was to be finally deposited had not yet been chosen. Moreover, its being carried thither might have implied delay to a late hour, and a possible violation of the Sabbath; and the disciples still conscientiously observed the regulations of the Jewish law. A temporary interment was therefore decided on. There was close at hand, in a garden, a tomb recently dug out in the rock which had never been used. It probably belonged to

one of the believers. Funeral caves, when destined for a single body, were in the form of a small room, at the bottom of which the place for the corpse was marked by a trough or couch let into the wall, and surmounted by an arch. As these caves were cut out of the sides of sloping rocks, the entrance, which was closed by a stone very difficult to move, was in the floor. The body of Jesus was placed in the cave, the stone was rolled to the door, and promises were made to return in order to give him a more complete burial. But the next day being a solemn Sabbath, the work was postponed till the day following.

The women went away after carefully noticing how the body was laid. They employed the remaining hours of the evening in making new preparations for the embalming. On the Saturday all rested.

On the Sunday morning the women, Mary Magdalen being the first, came at a very early hour to the tomb. The stone had been removed from the opening, and the body was no longer in the place where it had been laid. At the same time, the strangest rumours began to spread in the Christian community. The cry, "He is risen!" quickly ran from disciple to disciple. Love caused it to find ready credence everywhere. What had taken place? In treating of the history of the apostles we shall have to examine this point, and to inquire into the origin of the legends relating to the resurrection. For the historian, the life of Jesus finishes with his last breath. But such was the impression he had left in the heart of his disciples and of a few devoted women, that during some weeks more it was as though he were still alive and consoling them. By whom had his body been taken away? Under what conditions did enthusiasm, always prone to credulity, create the group of narratives by

which faith in the resurrection was established? In the absence of contradictory documents this can never be ascertained. Let us say, however, that the strong imagination of Mary Magdalen played an important part in the matter. Divine power of love! Sacred moments in which the passion of one possessed gave to the world a resuscitated God!

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE FATE OF THE ENEMIES OF JESUS.

ACCORDING to the calculation adopted by us, the death of Jesus happened in the year 33 of our era. At all events it could not have been either before the year 29, the preaching of John and Jesus having begun in the year 28, or after the year 35, since in 36, and probably before the Passover, both Pilate and Kaïapha lost their offices. The death of Jesus appears, however, to have had no connection whatever with these two removals. In his retirement, Pilate probably never for a moment dreamt of the forgotten episode which was to hand down his pitiful renown to the most distant posterity. As to Kaïapha, he was succeeded by Jonathan, his brother-in-law, son of the same Hanan who had played the chief part in the trial of Jesus. The pontificate was kept in the Sadducean family of Hanan for a long time still, and the latter, more powerful than ever, did not cease to wage against the disciples and family of Jesus the implacable war which it had commenced against the Founder. Christianity, which to Hanan owed the decisive act of its foundation, to him owed also its first martyrs. He was reputed one of the happiest men of his time. The man who was really guilty of the death of Jesus ended his life full of honours and respect, never for an

instant having doubted that he had rendered a great service to his nation. His sons continued to rule in the Temple, with difficulty kept in subjection by the procurators, and often dispensing with the consent of the latter in order to gratify their violent and haughty instincts.

Antipas and Herodias also soon disappeared from the political stage. Herod Agrippa having been raised to the dignity of king by Caligula, the jealous Herodias swore that she too would be a queen. Incessantly goaded on by this ambitious woman, who treated him as a coward, because he tolerated a superior in his family, Antipas overcame his natural indolence, and betook himself to Rome that he might solicit the title which his nephew had just obtained, in the year 39 of our era. But the affair turned out in the worst possible manner for him. Prejudiced in the eyes of the Emperor by Herod Agrippa, Antipas was removed, and dragged out the rest of his life in exile at Lyons and in Spain. Herodias remained with him in his disgrace. At least a hundred years were to pass by before the name of their obscure subject, now become deified, appeared in these distant lands to brand upon their tombs the murder of John the Baptist.

As for the wretched Judas of Kerioth, fearful legends were current about his death. It was asserted that he bought a field in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem with the price of his perfidy. There was in fact, to the south of Mount Zion, a place named *Hakeldama* ("the field of blood"). This, it was supposed, was the property acquired by the traitor. According to one tradition he slew himself. According to another, he had a fall in his field, in consequence of which his bowels gushed out. According to others he died of a sort of dropsy, attended by repulsive



circumstances, which were regarded as a punishment from heaven. The desire of making Judas a counterpart of Achitophel, and of showing in him the accomplishment of the menaces which the Psalmist pronounces against the perfidious friend, perhaps gave rise to these legends. It may be that in the retirement of his field of Hakeldama, Judas led a quiet and obscure life, while his former friends were conquering the world and spreading his infamy abroad. Perhaps also the terrible hatred which was concentrated on his head culminated in acts of violence in which was seen the finger of heaven.

The time of the great Christian vengeance was, however, far distant. The new sect was in no way responsible for the catastrophe which Judaism was soon to experience. The synagogue did not understand till much later to what it exposed itself by putting intolerant laws in force. The Empire was certainly still farther from suspecting that its future destroyer was born. For nearly three hundred years it was to follow its path without imagining that by its side principles were growing up that were destined to subject the world to a complete transformation. At once theocratic and democratic, the idea cast into the world by Jesus was, together with the Teutonic invasion, the most active cause of the dissolution of the work of the Cæsars. On the one hand, the right of all men to participate in the kingdom of God was proclaimed; on the other, religion was henceforth separated in principle from the state. Rights of conscience, withdrawn from political law, came to constitute a new power—the “spiritual power.” More than once this power has belied its origin. For ages bishops have been princes, and the Pope, a king; the so-called empire of souls has at various times shown itself as

a terrible tyranny, employing rack and stake to maintain itself. But the day will come when separation will bear its fruits, when the domain of things spiritual will cease to be called a "power," and be called "freedom." Born of the conscience of a man of the people, developed amongst the people, first beloved and admired by the people, Christianity was impressed with an original character which will never be effaced. It was the first revolutionary triumph, the victory of popular feeling, the advent of the simple in heart, the inauguration of the beautiful as understood by the people. Thus, in the aristocratic societies of the ancient world, Jesus opened the breach through which all will pass.

The civil power in fact, although innocent of the death of Jesus (it only countersigned the sentence, and even that in spite of itself), ought to bear a heavy part of the responsibility. In presiding over the scene at Calvary, the State inflicted a serious blow upon itself. A legend full of all kinds of irreverence prevailed, and became known throughout the whole world—a legend in which the constituted authorities played a detestable part, in which it was the accused that was in the right, and in which judges and public officials were leagued against the truth. Seditious in the highest degree, the history of the Passion, spread by a thousand popular images, displayed the Roman eagles as sanctioning the most iniquitous of executions, soldiers carrying it out, a prefect commanding it. What a blow for all established powers! They have never wholly recovered from it. How can they assume infallibility towards poor men, when they have on their conscience the gigantic blunder of Gethsemane?

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE WORK OF JESUS.

JESUS, we have seen, never emerged in action from Jewish circles. Although his sympathy for those despised by orthodoxy led him to admit pagans into the kingdom of God,—although he may have resided more than once in a pagan country, and once or twice may be seen in kindly relations with unbelievers,—it can be said that his life was entirely passed in the small and compact world into which he was born. In Greek or Roman countries he was never heard of; his name appears only in profane authors living a hundred years later, and even then indirectly in relation to seditious movements provoked by his doctrine, or persecutions suffered by his disciples. Even on Judaism itself Jesus made no durable impression. Philo, who died about the year 50, had not the slightest knowledge of him. Josephus, born in the year 37, and writing at the end of the century, mentions his execution in a few lines, as an event of secondary importance; and in his enumeration of the sects of his time he omits the Christians altogether. Nor in the *Mishnah* is there any trace of the new school; the passages in the two *Gemaras* in which the founder of Christianity is mentioned, do not date farther back than the fourth or fifth century. The essential work of Jesus was to

create around him a circle of disciples, whom he inspired with limitless affection, and in the hearts of whom he laid the germ of his doctrine. To have made himself beloved, "to the degree that after his death they ceased not to love him," was the great work of Jesus, and that which impressed his contemporaries most."<sup>1</sup> His doctrine was so little dogmatic, that he never dreamed of writing it or of causing it to be written. Men became his disciples, not by believing this thing or that thing, but by being attached to his person and by loving him. A few sayings gathered together from memory, and, above all, the type of character he set forth, with the impression it had left, were what remained of him. Jesus was not a founder of dogmas, or a maker of creeds; he was one that infused a new spirit into the world. The least Christian men were, on the one hand, the doctors of the Greek Church, who, from the fourth century, began to drag Christianity into a path of puerile metaphysical discussions, and, on the other, the scholastics of the Latin Middle Ages, who wished to draw from the Gospel a colossal system with thousands of articles. To follow Jesus in expectation of the kingdom of God was all that being a Christian originally meant.

It will be thus understood how, by an exceptional destiny, pure Christianity, after eighteen centuries, still presents the character of a universal and eternal religion. It is really because the religion of Jesus is in some respects the final religion. The product of a perfectly spontaneous spiritual movement, freed at its birth from all dogmatic restraint, having struggled three hundred years for liberty of conscience, Christianity, despite its failures, still reaps the fruits of its glorious origin. To renew itself, it has but to

<sup>1</sup> Jos., *Ant.* XVIII. iii. 3.

return to the Gospel. The kingdom of God, as we conceive it, differs widely from the supernatural vision which the early Christians hoped to see shine forth in the clouds. But the feelings brought into the world by Jesus are indeed ours. His perfect idealism is the highest rule of the unspotted and virtuous life. He has created the heaven of pure souls, where is found that for which we ask in vain upon earth—the perfect nobility of the children of God, absolute sanctity, the total removal of worldly soilure, in short, freedom, banished by society as an impossibility, and existent in all its amplitude in the domain of thought alone. The great Master of those who take refuge in this ideal paradise is still Jesus. He was the first to proclaim the kingship of the spirit; the first to say, at least by his actions, “My kingdom is not of this world.” The foundation of true religion was indeed his work: after him, all that remains is to develop it and make it fruitful.

“Christianity” has thus become almost a synonym of “religion.” All that is done outside the great and good Christian tradition is destined to be barren. Jesus founded the religion, as Socrates founded the philosophy, and Aristotle the science, of humanity. There was philosophy before Socrates, science before Aristotle. Since Socrates and since Aristotle, philosophy and science have made immense progress; but all has been built on the foundation which they laid. In the same way, religious thought had, before Jesus, traversed many revolutions; since Jesus, it has made great conquests; but nevertheless men have not improved, and will not improve, upon the essential idea which Jesus created; once and for all he decided the real meaning of pure worship. The religion of Jesus is limitless. The Church has had its epochs and its phases; it has imprisoned itself in

creeds which have only been or will only be temporal: Jesus founded the absolute religion, excluding nothing, and determining nothing unless it be the spirit. His creeds are not rigid dogmas, but images susceptible of endless interpretations. One might seek in vain for a theological proposition in the Gospel. All confessions of faith travesty the idea of Jesus, just as mediæval scholasticism by proclaiming Aristotle the sole master of a science finally achieved, perverted Aristotle's own ideas. Aristotle, had he been present at the scholastic debates, would have repudiated such a narrow doctrine; he would have been of the party of progressive science against that of routine which shielded itself beneath his authority; he would have applauded those who contradicted his teaching. In the same way, were Jesus to return amongst us, he would recognise as his disciples, not those who imagine they can compress him into a few catechismal phrases, but those who labour to carry on his work. Of all degrees of grandeur the eternal glory consists in having laid the first stone. It may be that in the physics and meteorology of modern times we may not discover a word of the treatises by Aristotle which bear these names; but, none the less, Aristotle remains the founder of natural science. Through whatever transformations dogma may pass, Jesus will still be in religion the creator of pure feeling, the Sermon on the Mount will never be superseded. No revolution will prevent us from attaching ourselves in religion to the great intellectual and moral ancestry at the head of which shines the name of Jesus. In this sense we are Christians, even when we separate ourselves on almost every point from the Christian tradition which has preceded us.

And this great foundation was indeed the personal work

of Jesus. To make himself adored to this degree, he must have been adorable. Love comes not into being save through an object worthy to enkindle it, and we should know nothing of Jesus were it not for the passion inspired by him in those about him, which compels us still to affirm that he was great and pure. The faith, the enthusiasm, the constancy of the first Christian generation are only to be explained by supposing a man of colossal greatness to have been at the source of the whole movement. At sight of the marvellous creations of the ages of faith, two impressions, equally fatal to sound historical criticism, arise in the mind. On the one hand we are led to suppose these creations too impersonal; to a collective action we attribute that which has often been the work of one powerful will and of one lofty mind. On the other hand, we decline to see men like ourselves in the authors of those extraordinary movements which have decided the destiny of humanity. Let us conceive a wider idea of the powers concealed by nature in her bosom. Our civilisations, governed by minute restrictions, can give us no idea of the power of man at periods in which the originality of the individual had a freer field for its development. Let us imagine a recluse near our capitals, dwelling in the mountains, emerging thence from time to time to present himself at the palaces of monarchs, compelling the sentinels to stand aside, and in imperious tones announcing to the kings the approach of revolutions in which he has been the moving spirit. The very idea provokes a smile. Such, however, was Elias; but Elias the Tishbite in our days would not pass the gate of the Tuileries. The preaching of Jesus and his free activity in Galilee do not deviate less completely from the social conditions to which we are accustomed. Free from our polished conventionalities,

exempt from the uniform education which refines us, but greatly stunts out individuality, these intense souls carried a surprising energy into action. They loom on our sight as the giants of an heroic age, which cannot have been real. Profound error! Those men were our brothers; they were of our stature, they felt and thought as we. But the breath of God was free within them; in us, it is fettered by the iron bonds of social pettiness, and condemned to irremediable mediocrity.

Let us place then the personality of Jesus on the highest summit of human greatness. Let us not be misled by exaggerated doubts in the presence of a legend which forever imprisons us in a superhuman world. The life of Francis of Assisi is also but a tissue of miracles. And yet has the existence of Francis of Assisi, and of the part he played, ever been held in doubt? Let us say no longer that the glory of the foundation of Christianity belongs to the multitude of the early Christians, and not to him whom legend has deified. The inequality of men is much more marked in the East than amongst us. There it is no uncommon thing to see arise, in the midst of a general atmosphere of wickedness, characters whose greatness causes us wonderment. Far from Jesus having been created by his disciples, he shows himself in all things superior to his disciples. The latter, with the exception of St. Paul and perhaps of St. John, were men lacking both invention and genius. St. Paul himself bears no comparison with Jesus, and as to St. John, he has only shown in his Apocalypse how much the poetry of Jesus inspired him. Hence the great superiority of the Gospels amidst the writings of the New Testament. Hence the painful fall we experience in passing from the history of Jesus to that of the apostles.



Even the evangelists themselves, who have bequeathed the image of Jesus to us, are so far beneath him of whom they speak that they constantly misrepresent him, from their inability to attain to his height. Their writings are full of errors and misconceptions. At every line we feel that a discourse of divine beauty has been transcribed by narrators who do not understand it, and substitute their own ideas for those which they only half comprehend. On the whole, the character of Jesus, far from having been embellished by his biographers, has been lowered by them. Criticism, to find what he really was, must discard a series of misconceptions resulting from his disciples' inferiority. These painted him as they conceived of him, and frequently, while thinking to raise him, have in reality degraded him.

I know that our modern ideas are more than once offended in this legend, conceived by another race, under another sky, and in the midst of other social needs. There are virtues which, in some respects, conform better with our taste. The good and mild Marcus Aurelius, the humble and gentle Spinoza, since they had no belief in their power to perform miracles, were free from some errors in which Jesus shared. Spinoza, in his profound obscurity, had an advantage which Jesus did not seek. By our extreme discretion in the employment of means of conviction, by our absolute sincerity, and by our disinterested love of the pure idea, we have founded—all we who have devoted our lives to science—a new ethical ideal. But the judgments of general history should not be restricted to considerations of personal merit. Marcus Aurelius and his noble teachers have had no permanent influence on the world. Marcus Aurelius left behind him beautiful books, an execrable son, and a decaying nation. Jesus remains

for mankind an inexhaustible principle of moral regeneration. Philosophy does not suffice for the multitude. They must have sanctity. An Apollonius of Tyana, with his miraculous legend, is of necessity more successful than a Socrates with his cold reason. "Socrates," it was said, "leaves men on the earth, Apollonius takes them to heaven; Socrates is but a sage, Apollonius is a god." Religion, thus far, has never existed without an element of asceticism, of piety, and of marvel. When, after the Antonines, it was desired to make a religion of philosophy, it was requisite to transform the philosophers into saints, to write the "edifying life" of Pythagoras or Plotinus, to attribute to them a legend, virtues of abstinence, meditation, and supernatural powers, without which neither credence nor authority were in that age to be found.

Let us abstain then from mutilating history in order to satisfy our petty susceptibilities. Which of us, pigmies as we are, could do what the extravagant Francis of Assisi, or the hysterical saint Theresa has done? Let medicine have names to express these great eccentricities of human nature; let it maintain that genius is a disease of the brain; let it see, in a certain moral sensitiveness, the commencement of consumption; let it class enthusiasm and love as nervous symptoms—it matters little. "Healthy" and "diseased" are entirely relative terms. Who would not rather be diseased like Pascal than healthy like the common herd? The narrow ideas about madness which are prevalent in our time very seriously mislead our historical judgments in questions of this order. A state in which a man says things of which he is not conscious, in which thought is produced without the summons and control of the will, now makes him liable to be confined as a lunatic.

Formerly all this was called prophecy and inspiration. The finest things in the world have resulted from a state of fever; every great creation involves a rupture of equilibrium; by a law of nature child-birth is a violent state.

We acknowledge indeed that Christianity is a creation too complex to have been the work of a single man. In one sense, all mankind have co-operated therein. There are no people so circumscribed as not to receive some breath of influence from without. History is full of strange coincidences, which cause very remote portions of the human species, without communication with each other, to arrive simultaneously at almost identical ideas and imaginations. In the thirteenth century, the Latins, the Greeks, the Syrians, the Jews, and the Mussulmans created scholasticism, and very nearly the same scholasticism from York to Samarcand; in the fourteenth century every one in Italy, in Persia, and in India yielded to a taste for mystical allegory; in the sixteenth, art was developed in a very similar manner in Italy, and at the court of the Great Moguls, without St. Thomas, Barhebraeus, the Rabbis of Narbonne, or the *Motecallemin* of Bagdad, having known each other, without Dante and Petrarch having seen any *Sufi*, without any pupil of the schools of Perouse or of Florence having visited Delhi. One might say that there are great moral influences running through the world like epidemics, without distinction of frontiers or race. The interchange of ideas in the human species does not operate solely by books or direct instruction. Jesus was ignorant of the very name of Buddha, of Zoroaster, of Plato; he had read no Greek book, no Buddhist *Sudra*, yet notwithstanding there was in him more than one element, which, without his suspecting it,

emanated from Buddhism, Parseeism, or the Greek wisdom. All this came through secret channels and by that kind of sympathy which exists between the different parts of mankind. The great man, on the one hand, receives all from his age; on the other, he governs his age. To show that the religion founded by Jesus was the natural consequence of what had preceded it, is in no way to diminish its excellence, but only to prove that it had a reason for its existence, and that it was legitimate—in other words, that it was in conformity with the instincts and needs of the heart in a given period.

Is it more just to say that Jesus owes all to Judaism, and that his greatness is only that of the Jewish people? No one is more disposed than myself to accord a high place to this unique people, whose particular gift seems to have been to contain in its midst the extremes of good and evil. No doubt Jesus came from Judaism; but he came from it as Socrates came from the schools of the sophists, as Luther came from the Middle Ages, as Lamennais from Catholicism, as Rousseau from the eighteenth century. A man is of his age and of his race even when he reacts against his age and his race. Far from Jesus having carried Judaism forward, he represents the rupture with the Jewish spirit. Even supposing that, in this respect, his thought may lend itself to some ambiguity, the general direction of Christianity after him permits no misconception. The tendency of Christianity has been to move farther and farther from Judaism. It will become perfect by returning to Jesus, but certainly not by returning to Judaism. The great originality of the founder remains then undiminished; his glory admits none to share it legitimately.

Undoubtedly circumstances greatly aided the success of this extraordinary revolution; but circumstances only support that which is just and true. Every branch of human development has its privileged epoch, in which it attains perfection without effort by a kind of spontaneous instinct. No labour of reflection could succeed in afterwards producing the masterpieces which nature creates at such moments by inspired geniuses. What the golden age of Greece was for secular art and literature, the age of Jesus was for religion. Jewish society exhibited the most extraordinary moral and intellectual state which the human species has ever passed through. It was indeed one of those divine hours in which great things come to pass by the co-operation of a thousand hidden forces, in which great souls find a flood of admiration and sympathy to sustain them. The world, delivered from the extremely narrow tyranny of small municipal republics, enjoyed great liberty. Roman despotism did not make itself felt disastrously until much later; and it was moreover always less oppressive in distant provinces than in the centre of the Empire. Our petty preventive interferences (far more destructive than death to things spiritual) did not exist. Jesus, during three years, was able to lead a life which, in our societies, would have brought him twenty times before the magistrates. The laws now in force regarding the illegal exercise of medicine would alone have sufficed to cut short his career. The sceptical dynasty of the Herods, on the other hand, paid little attention to religious movements; under the Asmoneans, Jesus would probably have been arrested at the outset. In such a state of society a reformer risked only death; and death is a gain to those who labour for the future. Imagine Jesus condemned to

bear the burden of his divinity until his sixtieth or seventieth year, losing his heavenly fire, wearing himself out little by little under the necessities of an unparalleled mission! Everything favours those who are marked for special destiny; they go on to glory by a kind of invincible impulse and command of fate.

This sublime being, who, day by day, still presides over the destiny of the world, we may call divine, not in the sense that Jesus has absorbed all divinity, or has been identical with it, but in the sense that Jesus is he who has caused his fellow-men to make the greatest step towards the divine. Mankind in its totality offers to view an assemblage of low and egoistic beings only superior to the animal in that their selfishness is more reflective. But from the midst of this uniform vulgarity there are columns rising towards heaven and bearing witness to a nobler destiny. Jesus is the highest of these columns which show to man whence he comes and whither he must go. In him was concentrated all that is good, all that is lofty in our nature. He was not sinless; he conquered these same passions that we fight against; no angel of God comforted him save his own good conscience; no Satan tempted him save that which every man bears in his heart. Just as many of his great qualities have been lost to us through the intellectual failings of his disciples, so it is probable that many of his faults have been concealed. But never has any man so much as he made the interests of humanity predominate in his life over the pettiness of self-love. Unreservedly bound to his mission, he subordinated all things to that mission so entirely that, towards the end of his life, the universe no longer existed for him. It was by this intensity of heroic will that he conquered heaven. There never was a man,

Sakyamunni perhaps excepted, who has to this degree trampled under foot, family, the joys of the world, and all temporal cares. Jesus lived only for his Father and for the divine mission which he believed himself fated to fulfil.

As for us, eternal children, fated to be powerless as we are, we who labour without reaping, we who will never see the fruit of that which we have sown, let us bow down before these demi-gods. They were able to do that which we cannot do: to create, to affirm, to act. Will great originality be born again, or will the world be content henceforth to follow the paths opened by the bold creators of distant ages? We know not. But whatever the unexpected phenomena of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed. His worship will constantly renew its youth, the legend of his life will bring ceaseless tears, his sufferings will soften the best hearts; all the ages will proclaim that, amongst the sons of men, none has been born who is greater than Jesus.





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